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ERSKINE.

No. 731.] Week ending January 3, 1903. [One Penny.

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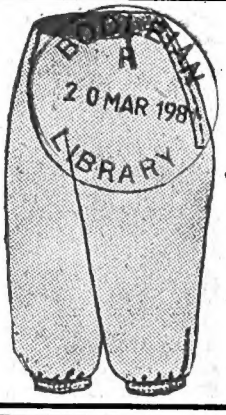

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Short Stories

No. 731.] [One Penny.

For the Week Ending January 9th, 1909.

A Woman Hater.

And How he was Converted.

"Colonel Clarence is a woman hater, Barbara; your enthusiasm over his coming is quite misplaced."

Uncle Denis spoke with a sneer. He usually did. I think he is the most aggravating person I know, excepting aunt Fanny. They both take a delight — a positive delight—in making sarcastic speeches; and in being generally disagreeable. They have what my dear London arabs call "a down" on me.

Uncle Denis is my guardian, unfortunately, and I came to live with him and his sister, aunt Fanny, when my dear dad died.

Dad and I had spent most of our time travelling about together, and we were just two of the very happiest people in the world. Aunt Fanny says I was shockingly spoilt and indulged—and uncle Denis sniffs assent.

Perhaps dad did spoil me. We spoilt each other, I believe! At any rate my uncle and aunt did their best to neutralise the effect of my past happiness. They were at great pains to snub me on every available occasion, and to assure me repeatedly that it was unlucky I should have turned out such a plain, uninteresting girl.

This sort of treatment palls upon one after a time, and Dipleigh Court (my uncle's place), was not in any case a very lively abode.

Naturally, therefore, I was pleased to hear that Colonel Clarence, *the* Colonel whose name was in everyone's mouth, who had led the famous charge of Raslapan, was actually to be one of a house party at Dipleigh in the following week.

Naturally, too, having been accustomed to express pleasure when I felt it, I showed my delight. Hence the snub bestowed on me by uncle Denis: "Colonel Clarence is a woman hater, Barbara, your enthusiasm is quite misplaced."

"I can't quite see that, uncle Denis," I said, uncle Denis does aggravate me so, he has such a little shrivelled-up face, and such ferret's eyes. "I don't see why I shouldn't be enthusiastic about a woman hater, if he has done something worthy of enthusiasm. What *have* his views about women got to do with his soldiering?"

Uncle Denis snorted unpleasantly, and smiled the sarcastic smile which fills me with an unholy longing to kick him.

"I merely wished to warn you that Colonel Clarence is not likely to return your enthusiastic interest. He is a most pronounced woman hater."

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"Then he has probably treated a woman badly, or been treated badly by a woman," I retorted; and I actually smiled up into uncle Denis' sour visage. I tried never to show when he annoyed me; it did so please him to upset and vex people, and he merely sniffed at me again.

"Woman hater, indeed?" I said to myself as I sat before the glass doing my hair on the evening the Colonel was expected. "Now, my dear, that means one of two things." I nodded at myself in the glass, "either the poor man has been run after by women till he hates the very sight of them, or one woman has broken his heart and he is afraid to trust it to another."

My dear old dad had taught me a good deal of shrewd worldly wisdom; although he had at the same time a most simple, loving soul.

"I *expect*"—I went on soliloquising aloud, "that this poor woman hater would be rather surprised and disappointed if he were not made much of; we shall see."

Then I laughed at my own reflection. "You plain, uninteresting girl," I said, curtseying to myself in the long pier glass which aunt Fanny declared was an incitement to vanity, "we shall see."

My gown was white and soft and fell in heavy folds. Dad always liked me in white. He said it went well with the copper of my hair, and my grey eyes. That evening I wore no colour at all; and the flowers in my belt were white roses.

There was only one person in the drawing-room when I went down, a tall man with a bronzed face, a heavy moustache and the very keenest blue eyes I ever saw.

"Behold the woman hater," I said to myself, and aloud, my hospitable instincts getting the upper hand, "I think you must be Colonel Clarence? I am Mr. Denis Tenby's niece."

He shook hands with me; but I could see a look of annoyance shoot into his eyes, and a most funny expression of bored resignation crossed his face. I knew perfectly well that he was thinking:

"Another woman to bother me and gush."

And before he could begin a polite nothing, I said:

"I know you will excuse me, but I have a note I must write before dinner," and I sailed off to the writing table, feeling, rather than seeing, the astonishment in his eyes.

From where I sat, I could just see his brown bullet head over the top of the chair into which he had subsided, and I

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noticed that he shuffled his feet impatiently once or twice, and I smiled as I wrote that unnecessary note. Before I had finished it, aunt Fanny came gushing in. She looked from the great man to me, a storm gathering in her face.

"Barbara," she said, in her 'well, I *am* surprised' voice, "did you not know Colonel Clarence?"

I came forward, wrinkling my brows.

"Know it, was Colonel Clarence," I said; "oh, yes, I guessed that you must be he, did I not?" I beamed upon the big person on the hearthrug, "but I had a very important note to write, and I knew Colonel Clarence would forgive me."

Then uncle Denis entered the room, his face wreathed in smiles, most unusual to it, and whilst he talked to the guest, aunt Fanny whispered acidly to me:

"I don't know what he will think of your behaviour, Barbara. To allow a man of his eminence to sit and amuse himself whilst you write notes—a chit of a girl too!"

Aunt Fanny always became incoherent in her tempers; she gave me no opportunity to reply, but turned back to the Colonel. We were alone that evening, and uncle Denis kept our guest in close conversation throughout dinner; whilst aunt Fanny listened with rapt attention.

I also listened, but I continued to look as if my thoughts were far away; I did it because I caught those blue eyes looking at me across the table with a puzzled expression, especially when the conversation turned upon the recent war.

When uncle Denis began to mention the word Raslapan, I saw out of the corner of my eyes what an intensely bored look crossed Colonel Clarence's face, but uncle Denis has the perception of a rhinoceros and went on gaily, asking a series of questions about that famous charge.

I pretended harder than ever not to hear, especially when I knew that the bored look on the face opposite was changing to one of increased surprise as he watched my impassive visage.

"You know every detail of Raslapan," my uncle suddenly said viciously, turning to me. I gave a great jump.

"I?" I said, "Oh, I *beg* your pardon, uncle Denis, I am so sorry. What was it you were saying?"

"You have Raslapan at your fingers' ends," he repeated, "you always go wild over the heroic." The sneer in his voice was rather unbearable, nevertheless I laughed lightly.

"Oh, I don't know about that," I said, "wars and rumours of wars have become almost monotonous lately, haven't they?" I flashed a look across the table; the blue eyes met mine, their look was still puzzled.

"Just like a girl," uncle Denis muttered, "never know their own mind two minutes together?"

All the same I knew *my* mind perfectly well!

After dinner aunt Fanny talked to me for fully half an hour upon the superiority of the young women of her youth. If they all turned into aunt Fannys I have no wish to emulate them.

Colonel Clarence was buttonholed by uncle Denis for the whole evening, and I stole away early. I knew that the soldier's eyes were often upon me, but I did not meet them again.

"It is most excellent for him not to imagine that every woman must adore him," I said to myself, and again spoke to my own image in the glass, "the woman hater must learn a lesson."

Next day the house filled up, one unmarried girl was of the party, my cousin, Annie Deane.

"Oh, Bab," she said eagerly, as I went upstairs with her, "you've got *him* here, haven't you?"

"Him?—who?" I asked.

"Why Colonel Clarence; *the* Colonel Clarence?"

"Oh, yes—he's here," I made my voice quite indifferent, and began to hum a tune.

"My dear Bab"—Annie looked at me with eyes grown round and awed, "you speak of him as if he were nobody, it makes me positively shiver with joy to think of seeing him close."

"My dear Annie," I said mockingly, "he is only a man, much like other men, except that he poses as a woman hater."

"Perhaps some hateful creature jilted him," she said warmly.

"Perhaps," I answered coolly, "I really don't know." Annie is a perfect goose. She took the line at once of hanging on Colonel Clarence's words as though they were pearls and diamonds, and of deferring to his opinion as if he were a Solomon.

"No wonder the poor thing is a woman hater," I said to myself twenty times a day, when I saw that not only Annie, but the rest of the ladies of the party, laid themselves, metaphorically, under his feet.

"The man simply despises women for being such fools. So do I." I felt really vicious; perhaps I have a spice of uncle Denis' temper somewhere in me. I did not join the throng of worshippers when they sat round with rapt countenances, asking questions about the campaign. I usually discovered something most important to do elsewhere, and the more persistently Colonel Clarence's blue eyes watched me, the more did I appear not to notice them.

One evening I slipped out on to the terrace after dinner. The garden was fragrant with the scent of roses; a silver moon hung in the deep sky; a nightingale sang in the copse.

A step on the gravel made me turn.

"What a delightfully peaceful place!" Colonel Clarence's deep voice struck on my ear.

"Yes," I said, "I came out to find some fresh air, and fresh ideas," I added mischievously, looking up at him. The war had been talked all dinner time.

"You don't take much interest in the war?" he asked.

"W-e-ll—one can have too much even of a good thing, can't one?" I said. "You see, I read all about it in the papers at the time."

I was rather proud of that speech, because no item of the war failed to interest me, really!

"I quite agree with you," he spoke eagerly. "I'm dead sick of being asked questions about it all; and ladies want to know so much."

"Do we?" I asked.

"I didn't include you amongst them," he exclaimed hastily.

"Thanks," I said; and I made him a low mocking courtesy; "it is true aunt Fanny says I'm more a tomboy than a woman," I added, reflectively.

Then I looked at him. His eyes shone in the moonlight; his teeth gleamed white as he smiled.

"You—don't care much about men, do you?" he said doubtfully.

"Not particularly," I answered nonchalantly, "but why?"

"Well, I thought; it seemed, I mean," the hero of Raslapan stumbled hopelessly.

"Yes?" I said, "you thought?"

"Well, you never seem to care to join in the conversation when—when I am talking——"

"Don't I?" I knitted my brows as though in deep thought; "I think I rather like to talk myself, you know. If you have monopolised the conversation at all, I expect I didn't care to play second fiddle. Was that it?"

I smiled at him sweetly; he looked utterly nonplussed.

"Oh!" he said feebly; "it wasn't exactly intentional then? I mean you didn't purposely avoid me."

I laughed.

"Why should I avoid you?" I said; "why you more than anybody else? All men are more or less alike, aren't they; just as women are?"

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I looked at him again.

Then I looked away, because there was a light in his eyes which made my heart beat.

"Are women all alike?" he said; "I don't find them so. I—I usually dislike women, but——"

"Do you?" I broke in lightly; "how funny; but why? You don't mean to say you're a woman hater? Oh! I'll go in at once!" I half turned from him, but he stopped me.

"If you only knew," he began, and there was a pleading note in his voice that I could not resist.

"I don't want to be a conceited jackass, but—my life has been a burden to me lately, because——"

"Because women are fools," I said shortly. "I've no patience with them. Why, I believe you might be quite nice if they hadn't spoilt you. It *is* a pity."

And before he could recover from his speechless astonishment I had fled into the house.

I did not see him again that night. Next morning when I went into the garden as usual before breakfast, he was the first person I met. He was in the rose garden, looking absently at a bush of white roses. When he saw me he smiled.

"You wore white roses the first day I saw you," he said.

"Did I?" I answered quietly, but my heart beat much faster than I liked, and I did not care about meeting the glance of those keen eyes.

"Come and sit here and tell me what you meant last night," he said, pointing to a seat. Now to this day I know not why I obeyed him; I suppose his habit of commanding gives him a masterful air. Anyhow, I sat down.

"What I meant last night?" I asked, trying to speak lightly; "why, what did I say? We talked about so many things."

"You said I was spoilt because women were fools."

"*Did I?* How rude of me!" I made patterns on the gravel then with my foot for I felt that his eyes were on me, and I was getting more and more nervous.

"In what way am I spoilt?" he persisted.

"Well, you know," I said, plucking up courage, "you do seem to think that everybody is just made to listen to you and worship you. You may call yourself a woman hater—but——"

"But what?"

"But I don't believe you are." I glanced at him nervously; his eyes twinkled, a smile glimmered round his mouth.

"You are fairly outspoken," he said.

"Yes. I always was. You see, I am not in the least afraid of you, and I think it's a great pity you should go about posing as a woman hater, which simply makes silly women admire you, and sensible ones despise you. Now why not treat us all naturally? I——"

I was well launched on my subject, when suddenly I felt my hand taken and grasped firmly in his big brown one.

"Are you one of the silly, or sensible women?" he said. "No—look at me and tell me truly"—for I was most busy at that moment looking at a rose-bud into which a bee was dipping. I had to look round, he was so masterful. He only grasped my hand tighter.

"I—I—don't think I have considered the matter," I said, with flagrant disregard of truth.

"You don't know whether you despise me or not?" Something pleading crept into the masterfulness of his voice; he bent a little nearer to me.

"I—I—don't despise you," I said—my voice shook, which annoyed me; "but of course I wouldn't grovel round you as though you were a little god. I don't think you *are!*"

I looked at him defiantly.

"What is your opinion of me?" *His* voice shook now.

"I don't exactly see what my opinion of you matters, one way or the other." My coolness returned as his vanished; "I think you are just a very human sort of man," I ended mischievously; "and I can't imagine what uncle Denis would think if he heard me giving my opinion!"

"Pshaw! Who cares about uncle Denis?"

"Well, you see, he says I am a chit of a girl who has no right to opinions; a plain, uninteresting chit of a girl." I spoke slowly and thoughtfully, making patterns with my foot. My hand was still a prisoner.

His grasp on it tightened.

"A plain — uninteresting—chit of a girl—*You?*"

"Yes—I——"

"I wish I could duck uncle Denis in the nearest and dirtiest duck-pond," he growled. Then suddenly his voice changed and softened. I never imagined his deep voice could grow so gentle.

"Shall I tell you something?" he said.

I nodded.

"I can't get away from the memory of you as I first saw you; all in white, with your crown of bronze hair. I—may be a conceited ape, and spoilt, and everything you say, but—I love you dear——"

The simple ending made my heart leap. I was silent because I could not speak.

"Could you put up with a fellow like me?" he said anxiously.

Now I badly wanted to put my arms round his neck, and tell him then and there that I loved the very ground he walked on, but it would never have done, would it? It would have simply made him put me on the level of all his other silly worshippers. Besides which, it is very bad for a man to know too much of one's feelings. So I only said:

"I believe I *could* put up with you, only—you won't want me to fall down and worship, will you? I shan't ever think you an angel——"

Then he took me in his arms and kissed me.

All the same I think he *is* very nearly perfect, and I am most truly sorry for all the wives who have not got husbands like mine!

L. G. Moberly.

"I HAVE noticed that it is the bad boy who seems to get on best in school." "Yes; the teachers promote them to get rid of them."

"HERE, my little boy," said a benevolent old gentleman to a weeping boy, "I wouldn't cry that way if I were you." "How did you cry when you were a little boy?" asked the weeper, during a temporary cessation of tears.

THEY were two little children, and they were painting pictures in their school books. One youngster finished a cow in blue, and then remembered never to have seen a blue cow. "Never mind," said the other; "we will say the cow is cold."

WIFE (to her husband, who is a great criminal lawyer, and who has found fault with the dinner): "There you go again, always finding fault with my cooking. You never see any redeeming qualities in me, and yet you have an excuse for every murderer that comes along."

"SAY, pa," queried Willie the other morning, while preparing his geography lesson, "how many motions has the earth?" "I don't know, Willie," replied the fond parent, as he bound a towel soaked in ice water about his throbbing brow, "but they're numerous, very numerous."

"PAPA," said the young mother, "I've decided on a name for the baby. We will call her Imogen." Papa was lost in thought for a few minutes. He did not like the name, but if he opposed it his wife would have her own way. "That's nice," said he, presently. "My first sweetheart was named Imogen, and she will take it as a compliment." "We will call her Mary, after my mother," was the stern reply.

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HER FAIRY STORY;

Or, HELPING HIS RIVAL.

How bewitching the girl looked, with her cheeks aglow where the frosty air had touched them, and her usually bright, expressive eyes rendered still more sparkling and vivacious by the delight of the afternoon ride! She had taken off her warm jacket and her hat and gloves, and had returned to the cosy drawing-room to chat with her companion, a man of six-and-twenty.

He gazed at her as she lay ensconced in the cushions of a particularly comfortable arm-chair; she was staring dreamily into the fire, having sunk into a reverie. If anyone could have looked into his eyes, they would have observed an expression indicative of love and longing.

"Bessie," he said suddenly, causing her to start slightly at the abrupt break in the silence, "when are you going to marry me?"

"I wonder how many more times you will ask that question, Frank?" she inquired with a smile. "You have been asking it off and on ever since I was a little girl and you were only just a little bigger boy! You asked me every time you saw me with a new frock; of that I am quite certain!"

"And now I ask it without even that provocation!" retorted Frank. "You have never given me an answer. In the earlier days I did not attach so much importance to not having a reply, but we are older now, Bessie, and the matter is more serious."

Bessie laughed. The laugh began merrily, but it assumed a different note before it concluded, although Frank did not notice the change. This question and answer had, as she said, been a commonplace for years; they had grown up to regard it unconsciously as something in the nature of a jest that is half in earnest, and she was treating it so now, but with a purpose. Frank was only half in earnest still; he was in that peculiar frame of mind when one accepts a refusal, or procrastination, contentedly because one feels sure that the thing will come about in time.

"Well," he yawned, for the warmth of the fire had a somnolent effect. "I shall ask you again soon, because"—and here he became more wideawake, more serious—"because I want you, Bessie!"

"Frank," she said quietly, "there is only one obstacle to our union."

"And that is some petty affair not worth considering, of course!" he rejoined promptly. "We have been so much together, that——"

"It is that I do not, cannot, love you enough to become your wife, Frank! You are a dear old boy, and—and you will understand it."

"We are getting on a bit!" he declared with a laugh. "I have received something more than the usual reply, so I hope soon to get the wedding-day fixed!"

She looked away from him and gazed into the fire once more. Her face was troubled, but he could not see it in the gloom of the gathering darkness.

"Frank," she said softly, after a pause, "I used to tell you fairy tales when we were boy and girl. Perhaps I am out of practice now, but suppose I try? I have a fairy tale which I should like to relate."

"I don't see what that has to do with the subject in hand, Bessie, but I suppose I mustn't press you any further to-day. We shall get further next time. Yes, go on with the fairy story, but you won't mind if I fall asleep, will you?"

She slipped from her chair and seated herself on a hassock near him, so that he could have placed his hand quite easily on her head and caressed the glossy hair.

"Once upon a time," she began, in true fairy-tale style, "there were a father and a daughter who went to Scotland to stay for a few weeks in a mansion of the Western Highlands. They rented the place for the time, transacting the business of hiring through the owner's solicitor."

"That isn't very exciting," remarked Frank, "and I won't guarantee not to go to sleep!"

"Yes, you will!" replied the girl in a tone of quiet confidence. "Well, the stay was a very pleasant one, but the girl wished to see the country and the two made journeys to places quite a long distance from the mansion and sometimes had to put up at a hotel for a night in consequence.

"I wanted to see—I mean, the daughter wanted to see—some of the crofters on their pasturage holdings; some of the poorest, if possible; and to that end she persuaded her father to undertake one of those long journeys. When they reached the particular locality mentioned by a friend as a favourable spot, we set about visiting some of the people in their dwellings."

"Rather cheeky of you!"

"It was while visiting the occupants of these dwellings, by whom we were very hospitably received, that a strange incident occurred. We were met at the door of a wooden structure, with a thatched roof, by a man who was not a crofter, although he was dressed in the garb of one and his beard and hair were unkempt and untrimmed. He was a tall, strongly built man under thirty, and he showed the training of a gentleman as soon as his attitude of defiance yielded to one of affability, which it did after a few words."

Bessie stopped and Frank sat up a little. "What of the man?"

"He showed us into his best room and did his best to make us comfortable. The girl was surprised to find on the shelf many books that betrayed the scholar; and in his conversation he unconsciously gave indications of having travelled and of being a well-bred, highly intellectual, chivalrous man—a gentleman, in short.

"My father left us conversing about music, of which he was undoubtedly very fond, and on other subjects, and the fifteen minutes during which his absence lasted, appeared to go like the same number of seconds. I longed to ask this crofter why he came to be there, but some indefinable influence restrained me, and I suppose it was so with my—I mean, with the girl's father!" concluded Bessie hastily, recognising that she had been speaking in the first person.

"We left the crofter's dwelling," she went on, again relapsing into the personal, "but not before father took a snapshot at this 'interior,' as he called it, and when the picture was developed I was surprised—and pleased—to see that it included the crofter and myself as we sat talking. I will show it to you in a minute! We went back to our temporary home, and three days later the crofter appeared and asked that he might see me, in order to give me some Spring flowers and to leave some music which he thought might please me! I asked the servant to show him in; they were our own servants, travelling with us. He entered, and I was pleased to find that he had trimmed his beard, and had his hair cut. I think that he was wearing a slightly better suit of clothes, but I didn't notice that especially; I only noticed that he was even more like a gentleman in bearing than before.

"I am afraid that I was rather forgetful of conventionality, for I asked him if he would like to hear the old pieces played, and I played them. One of them was a dreamy

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song, a love song. Then he went and I have not seen him since."

"You said that you would show me the picture!" said Frank in a strained voice. He was wideawake now.

"Oh, never mind that! It is only a fairy story, you know, and I do not understand why I have told it, except—But let us forget it."

"I should like to see the picture!" said Frank in a strangely subdued, but persistent tone.

She brought it to him, lighting the gas that he might see it the better. It was not a perfect picture by any means, but it was sufficiently distinct for him to see the two faces clearly. He started as he recognised the features of the man and his hand trembled as he muttered under his breath:

"Alec Malcolm!"

"Don't smile at father's amateurish effort and say things to yourself about it!" said Bessie, with a poor attempt at jocularity. She was wondering what effect the fairy story and the snap-shot would have upon him.

"Thank you," he said, handing it back to her and speaking nonchalantly. "You promised me a game of chess, and I should like to undertake something serious after the frivolity of fables and fairy tales!"

Bessie's father had announced his intention of spending some time on the Continent, and within a week after the scene in the drawing-room they were off. Frank Staynes made rapid preparations, and on the following day he was off to Scotland. He had no difficulty in finding the locality mentioned by Bessie, and at noon on a cold Spring day he knocked at the door of the crofter dwelling. He had found it by giving a description of his man, for he rightly guessed that Malcolm had assumed another name.

"Frank Staynes!" gasped the astounded Malcolm, on beholding his former college friend. "How—how did you find me out?"

"That's another story, Alec!" replied Staynes lightly. "I've come to spend a week or two with you for the sake of quietude. I want to read up—something—and my nerves are not so steady as they ought to be, so I want more solitude. See? Oh, I'm prepared to rough it, and I can pay for my keep and the rent, old fellow. Don't shut your door against an old college acquaintance."

"Well, if you put it like that," said Malcolm, "I'll not say nay to you. Come in, and be welcome to what there is, but I'm puzzled to understand how you found me! I thought I had slipped from all the old friends and acquaintances."

"Let us have something to eat," said Frank, "and we can go into the thing. I see you have your frugal repast ready and as there doesn't appear to be enough for two, I am glad that I brought a sandwich or so with me."

"I'll have enough for two at the next meal," smiled Malcolm. "I didn't expect company, you see!"

The "frugal repast" was soon ended, and Frank Staynes carried his trunk into another room which served as a bedroom. There was no second bed, but Staynes soon arranged that with a rug, and stated that a hammock was coming. He had ordered one at the place where he had bought his rough clothing, which he intended to wear.

"I'm going to be a crofter for a time," he declared, "and I'm sure it will do me good!"

He had so far dodged the question asked by Malcolm, as to how he had found out his former schoolfellow. He proceeded deliberately with his plan, and, for the better accomplishment of his object he avoided asking why Malcolm had chosen the life he was leading.

"I'll find out all about it soon; first let me learn the truth on the other matter!" mused Staynes. "Does Malcolm love——"

A slight exclamation from Malcolm interrupted his musings. He, Frank, had tumbled several things out of his trunk for the purpose of placing them handy on the shelves or the table; a cabinet photo of Bessie Danvers had fallen out, and this had caught the eye of Alec Malcolm. Staynes pretended not to notice the exclamation, but proceeded to sort his things. He picked up the photo and put it in a small writing case which he had brought with him. In a few minutes he had done all that was necessary, and he was ready to accompany his host to the open, where he had to tend the sheep.

Alec Malcolm seemed much preoccupied at times, while at others he would talk freely. It was in one of those expansive moods that he disclosed his reason for living apart from his fellows.

"It is strange, perhaps, but I am doing it for three or four years in order to raise money," he said. "My father was owner of an estate without a rent-roll, for all the money obtained from the cottages on it is swallowed up in repairs, and so forth. When he died, and I came into the property, I found that there was nothing to live on. My father had kept up a goodly show by living on his capital, and all that was left when his debts were paid was the estate, which I cannot sell, and a large number of mining shares that seem to be worthless, although my father never lost faith in their possibilities. He believed the mines would prosper one day and the shares bring in large dividends and be worth a lot of money.

"It was a blow to me when I learnt the truth, and I pondered on ways and means. I found out that I could easily let the house, for shooting, and so on, and make about £700 a year net out of it. I might have done that and lived quietly abroad, or gone to Australia and set up in business, but sentiment overpowered me. I love the old country, I love Scotland. So I descended to this, and am earning a small living, while I am putting the rent away in the bank. In five years I shall have a fair sum, and then I hope to be able to do something—I can't tell what yet. I like the life, but I fear that I was beginning to degenerate when, nearly a year ago, I was pulled up by—well, by Fate, I suppose!"

He became quiet after that, and Frank Staynes left him alone.

At night Frank turned in first. Malcolm said he was not sleepy and intended to read. An hour passed, and then Staynes saw his host walk stealthily into the room and approach the writing-case.

"It's mean, but I must see that face again!" he muttered. He was unconscious that, in his excitement, he was talking audibly enough for anyone to hear. Moreover, Staynes was asleep! "How came *he* with her portrait? It haunts me!"

Staynes, peering at him, saw him open the case, take out the photo and stare at it in the dim light of a lantern which lighted his face as well as the picture. If Staynes had entertained any doubt that Alec Malcolm loved Bessie Danvers, that glance at the former's face dispelled it.

It seemed to be several minutes before Malcolm took his gaze from the photo, and then it was to throw a swift glance at the hammock. He saw nothing, but, through a slit in the material, Staynes saw him kiss the photo and replace it in the writing-case.

Several days passed, but no allusion was made to the woman whom both men loved. Staynes did not remain awake long after turning in at night, and Malcolm was always the last to retire; but Staynes knew that the photo had been looked at, because its position in the case, arranged by himself, was always a little different in the morning.

Frank noticed a cup that was kept scrupulously clean, but never used. It remained on the top shelf of a cupboard—not that in which Malcolm kept his crockery and food, but one in which he kept some of his best books.

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"This seems to be a souvenir," he remarked casually. "I should like to have my tea in that!"

He took it down and made ready to place it on the table. Malcolm laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Not that, Frank! That is sacred to me! Don't laugh! I can't bear it, and I shall punch you if you do!"

The concluding words were uttered fiercely. Frank laughed and replaced the cup with a jesting apology; he had adopted the light tone with the object of soothing Malcolm, but it was wrongly interpreted, and he nearly received the promised punch.

One morning, Staynes went into the bedroom hurriedly, and thus unintentionally precipitated the crisis. Malcolm was standing near the writing-case with the photo in his hand. He was caught in the act, and he coloured to the roots of his hair.

"Hallo!" cried Staynes cheerily, but with a cheeriness that was wholly assumed. "What have you got there?"

For a second the other did not reply; then he spoke with suppressed passion.

"Frank, what is she to you? You have her photo, and such a thing is not permissible unless a man has asked the woman to be his wife! Tell me, do you love her?"

"Miss Danvers is my third or fourth cousin, or first cousin four times removed, or something of that kind," answered Frank, "and she and I are the best of friends—quite brother and sister, in fact. We've known each other since we were children, but she doesn't love me, and wouldn't have the slightest idea of marrying me even if I were a Duke! I'm positive of that!"

So he was, but he had not answered Malcolm's question. His reply was sufficient for his host, however, who placed the photo reverently on the case, and seized Frank's hands in his iron grip.

"Frank," he said brokenly, "forgive me for my caddish act in going to your desk, but I love her! She was here a year ago, and she has brightened my life, although it has been somewhat embittered by the thought that I could never possess her. Then I saw it among your things, that photo, and I have been nearly mad since. If there were only a chance for me!"

"I do not see why there should not be," declared Frank stoutly, despite the pain at his own heart. "Why not come back with me and see her?"

"Have I anything to offer her?" asked Malcolm sorrowfully.

"You have nearly three thousand saved, and a splendid home. She has enough money in her own right."

"I could not accept——"

"And spoil your own happiness and hers?" cried Frank angrily.

"Hers?" repeated Malcolm, catching at the word. "Do you mean——?"

"Come with me and ascertain for yourself, Alec. I cannot answer for a woman's feelings!"

A letter forwarded from home told Frank that Bessie had returned from the Continent, and he and his host left the crofter holding for London. Malcolm took the cup with him, and they broke the journey at Malcolm's estate, where the cup was placed in safety. "She drank from it," was all the explanation vouchsafed by him.

"Do you think she would like this?" asked Malcolm, while looking over the grounds. "She seemed happy enough while she was staying here."

"It was here?" inquired Staynes in astonishment. "I never thought of asking her where she stayed. So you really visited her in your own home?"

"Yes," assented Alec Malcolm with a smile. "I took care that none of the tenants should see me, and all the old servants are gone!"

They went to the metropolis and called at the residence of Mr. Danvers. Staynes sent up his card to Bessie, who came running into the reception room.

"I'm so glad to see—Mr. Alexander!" she gasped, as she caught sight of the other. "I did not know that you were coming with Frank; he only sent up his own card."

"I trust that you are really glad to see Mr. Alexander, Bessie, as you said just now!" said Frank, with a quiet smile. "I am sure he is glad to see you, and I may tell you that his real name is Alexander Malcolm, and I hope you will congratulate him on a circumstance that will enable him to give up the life of a crofter and reside again in his proper home, the place where you lived last year. I see by the papers that certain mines are looking up, and the shares promise to be worth a great deal, but I fancy that my old college friend has not read the good news yet!"

As they glanced at one another, Frank Staynes slipped away to a little study which was always regarded as his room when he was staying with the Danvers. How long he sat there he knew not, but he was aroused by feeling a pair of arms incircle his neck, and the touch of lips on his cheek.

"You're as good as a brother to me, Frank! However can I repay you?" said a well-known voice. "It is all your doing! It is so good of you, and—I am so happy!"

F. Brewster.

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Miss Anne Dewar, 7 Henry Street, Edinburgh.
J. Nicol, 10 St. Mirren Street, Paisley.

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Love Problem No. 3.

WAS IT LOVE?

Can a Man be in Love with Two Women at the Same Time?

DICK FRASER had always been a great trouble to himself. He was so uncomfortably liberal in his views.

He possessed the fatal gift of being able to see both sides of a question with equal clearness, and the consequence was that he never could make up his mind as to which was the right side.

Dick's political persuasions were characterised by such breadth of view that neither he nor his friends had ever been able to determine whether he was a Liberal or a Conservative or even a Liberal-Conservative, and he had never been heard to express a definite *pro* or *con* in any discussion concerning religion, sociology, or any other problem of the day.

Dick himself was the first to admit that it was irritating and uninteresting to have no fervid convictions of any kind, but he was too conscientious to save himself trouble—as men have been known to do—by feigning opinions he did not possess.

"There's so much to be said on both sides," he would declare uneasily, and the unfortunate thing was that with Dick this was no mere phrase of a lazy man who has no wish to argue. Dick, if called upon to do so, could advance forcible arguments in plenty to prove his contention.

Then, one day, Dick made the acquaintance of Nora Maclean, and soon afterwards he discovered, to his own intense astonishment, that there was at least one question to which he was prepared to give a definite answer.

His attitude towards matrimony had hitherto been a consistent part of his general non-committal policy.

Had he been called upon to make deliberate choice between a wife and single blessedness he would have been placed in no small dilemma, since he agreed with his married friends that there was much to be said in favour of bachelorhood, but was equally ready to admit the charms of married life as described by the bachelors of his acquaintance.

It is conceivable that, had he been required to plunge either into bachelorhood or matrimony from some neutral plane, Dick would have been entirely at a loss. The respective advantages and disadvantages of either state would have been sure to confront him with equal force, and he would not have known which to select.

The fact that he had been born a bachelor simplified matters. It seemed to lessen his responsibility, as it were. So long as he continued in his original state, he could hardly be said to have made any choice at all.

And so it happened that Dick Fraser had attained the ripe old age of twenty-seven without committing himself to matrimony.

As an eligible and good-looking male, he had met several women who had tried to please him. They had succeeded, up to a certain point, but not one of them had been able to alter his outlook upon life.

That was before the advent of Nora Maclean, of course.

Nora changed all that. She was a charming girl, made to be loved, and she captured Dick's heart without an effort.

Before Dick had known Nora a week he admitted joyfully to himself that he was head over ears in love, and that matrimony was the only desirable state of man.

For the first time in his life Dick felt no hesitation in expressing an opinion, and he realised this fact with something very like triumph.

Undoubtedly Dick would have proposed to Nora, and probably he would have been accepted, but for an unfortunate accident.

The accident was the existence of Nora's cousin Kate.

Exactly two weeks after he had first met Nora, Dick was introduced to Kate. From that moment his doom was sealed.

Kate was not half so pretty as her cousin, yet Dick felt her fascination the moment he set eyes upon the girl.

He thrilled at the touch of her hand, he listened, enthralled, to the sound of her voice. Her dark, wistful eyes cast a strange spell upon him.

"This is the woman I love," he told himself rapturously, and for one brief moment Nora's image faded from his mind.

For one brief moment only. Then—well—then Nora happened to enter the room, and Dick became a prey to such a conflict of emotions as most men, it is to be hoped, are mercifully spared.

With a sudden shock Dick realised that while adoring Kate, he had not ceased to worship Nora.

Just as Kate's touch had thrilled him, so Nora's thrilled.

Kate's gentle, winsome face bewitched him, so did Nora's glowing cheeks and dancing eyes.

Kate's voice was low and tender, Nora's as clear and silvery as a high-toned bell. The sound of both was music in Dick's ears.

Kate held him captive by her sweet seriousness, Nora by her enchanting gaiety.

When Dick recovered from the first shock of these novel sensations he told himself confidently, and with a laugh at his own expense, that such an impossible state of affairs could not possibly last.

At present, he argued, he probably loved with a superficial passion engendered by purely external charms, in which case it was conceivable that two, or even three, or any number of women could inspire the same emotions.

As yet, he told himself, he had not studied the true inwardness of Kate and Norah. He was unacquainted with their *real* selves, their characters, their mental and moral attributes.

Time would reveal all these, and then surely he would know whether to read his fate in Kate's soft brown eyes or Nora's laughing blue ones!

But as time went on Dick only grew more and more distracted in his mind, for Kate and Nora, on closer acquaintance, appeared as equally lovable as before.

They were as dissimilar in their natures as in their appearance. Both natures, alas, appealed to Dick. Even the discovery that Nora had a temper did not affect his impartiality.

The situation would have been ridiculous had Dick not been so desperately in earnest.

How happy could I be with either
Were t'other dear charmer away.

sang someone in a frivolous mood.

Dick echoed the sentiment in all good faith.

At the end of six months of mingled bliss and agony Dick, in a sudden burst of confidence, was moved to make full confession of his dilemma to his chum and other self, Charlie Bourchier.

Charlie, with great simpleness and directness, advised Dick not to be a fool. Then, perceiving that this advice made little impression, he proceeded to prove, to his own complete satisfaction, that Dick was not in love at all.

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"Love, my dear fellow," he remarked placidly, "is an all-absorbing passion for *one woman*. The very definition of love makes your case impossible."

"But how do you know that this narrow definition of love is right?" demanded Dick. "My own experience shows me that it is not."

Charlie tried another tack.

"Perhaps you're really in love with only one of them all the time without knowing it," he said. "Tell me, doesn't either of them ever engross your thoughts in preference to the other?"

"Of course, when one only is near me, I can give no thought to the other."

"But when neither happens to be there, what then?"

"Then I think of both, all the time."

"Supposing both were in danger of their lives at the same moment, which one would you try to save?" persisted Charlie.

Dick gave a groan.

"It's no good, old man," he said wearily. "I've tried all that. I've asked myself all the questions you're going to ask dozens of times. About saving their lives, for instance—I couldn't answer that. I only know that both their lives are equally precious to me. I've analysed my own sensations till I thought I should go mad, and always with the same result. I'm abnormal, I suppose, and there's an end of it."

"It's the outcome of your general broadmindedness, Dick. You never could make up your mind to reject one side of a question in favour of the other. But I scarcely thought you would carry your principles into your love-making."

"I can't help it, I wish to Heaven I could!"

"Well, you can't marry them both, you know," said Charlie mildly. "By the way," he added, "do you happen to know whether your affection is reciprocated?"

"How do I know till I ask them? And how can I ask them both?"

"Well, one generally has an inkling on the subject. Now, supposing one of them liked you and the other didn't, wouldn't that solve the difficulty? It has been known to do so in similar cases."

"Never in a case like mine!" cried Dick. "I know what you are thinking of. There are plenty of men who are mildly attracted by any number of women and who go and marry the most convenient one. But my case is different. You forget that. *I* adore where they only admire. It would be impossible for me to marry one, for I know that I should continue to worship the other."

"Of course," remarked Charlie thoughtfully, "there's always the possibility of neither of them caring for you."

"Ye—es," replied Dick.

Charlie detected the obvious insincerity.

"I always thought you were a man of honour," he said.

"What do you mean?" asked Dick uneasily.

"Unless I am very much mistaken you are making love to two trusting women."

"That's not true. Nothing could be more—more—er—circumspect that my behaviour."

"Nonsense. You may flatter yourself you're circumspect. By your own showing you're in love and, to a certain extent, you're bound to give yourself away to the objects of your affection. Of course, each of them is sure to imagine *she* is the only one. If she cares for you, you are raising hopes which you may never be able to fulfil. As a man of honour and a gentleman there is only one course open to you."

"And what is that?"

"You must go away. You must not attempt to see either of these girls again until you have definitely decided which of them you want to make your wife."

And Dick who, to tell the truth, felt guiltier than he cared to confess, lost no time in taking his friend's advice.

"My belief is," said Charlie to himself, "Dick's not a bit different from other men. It's all imagination. He's not in love at all. When a man's really in love there's only one woman in the world for him. When Dick meets *the* woman he'll find out his mistake. Time will show."

But time, strangely enough, has done nothing of the kind. Though Nora and Kate Maclean were led to the altar years ago, Dick Fraser is a bachelor still. In his heart of hearts he is convinced that there will always be two women in the world for him.

Grete Hahn.

MOONLIGHT - - - - REFLECTIONS.

"May I have the pleasure of a dance?"

The girl addressed turned sharply away from the group of black-coated youths amongst whom she had been endeavouring to divide her favours impartially.

"Mr. Maxwell," she exclaimed, the colour leaving her cheeks.

The man smiled.

"You have not forgotten me then?" he said, taking her much defaced programme. "Which may I have, there are not many left to choose from."

"The tenth, thirteenth and fifteenth are still unappropriated, you may have any of them."

"Or all would be better still. It is a long time since I have seen you, and many things must have happened since. Be generous, and for the sake of old times let me have all three."

"It is against my principles, but still—as you say—it is a long time since we met, so—if you *really* wish it, you may have them."

"Thank you," he said, and scribbled his initials against the dances.

* * *

The strains of a dreamy waltz were filling the big ball-room when Guy Maxwell came to claim his partner. It was the beginning of the winter season in southern California, and the Hotel del Coronado was filled to overflowing with guests escaping from the cold eastern winter. The dance was merely the ordinary Saturday evening one, but the huge ball-room, with its brilliant lights and floral decorations had the appearance of some large function.

Handsome women in gorgeous New York and Paris gowns, strolled through the beautiful rooms. Belles from Washington and Baltimore vied with Californian girls from the sleepy little town across the bay, while outside the deep thunderous boom of the Pacific, whose waves rolled up almost to the panelled walls of the ball-room, mingled with the wail of the violins.

Neither Maxwell nor his partner spoke, and before the music ceased he stopped rather abruptly, and saying, "Shall we go outside?" led her through the door on to the glass verandah which runs the whole length of the hotel on the side fronting the sea. They strolled to the end and then stopped. He threw up one of the large windows, and they stood side by side, and in silence which neither seemed to care to be the first to break, gazed at the wonderful scene before them.

And in truth it was a scene to have made the most thoughtless pause and think. The waves rolled up and broke a few

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feet below them. A full moon shed its brilliant, pure, cold light on the broad expanse of the mighty ocean; to the right the dark outline of Point Loma showed up faintly in and to the left as far as the eye could see a continuous line of white breakers formed a semi-circle to the cliffs of Mexico.

The thoughts of both the watchers were busy with the past. Two years before Sybil Delaunay, then in the zenith of her youth, and tasting the first draughts of success in the art of sculpture, to which she determined to devote her life, refused to marry the man who stood beside her, and sent him away, vowing that no man should ever find part in her life, nor interfere between her and the work she loved. Disappointed and heartsick Maxwell had thrown up his profession in which he was already being spoken of as a rising surgeon, and disappeared from Miss Delaunay's world. From that day to this she had never heard anything of him until he appeared to-night, at this hotel in the Far West, to which she had come for the winter with a party of friends. She had learnt much of herself since the time when he had left her, and had begun to realise that art alone cannot fill the heart of a woman, nor that a successful career was all that she required to make her happy.

To the man who watched her she seemed in the moonlight almost unearthly in her beauty. Not the faintest breeze stirred the ripples of her golden hair. Every sequin on her black gown caught the reflection of the moon, until her slight form seemed to be sheathed in silver.

A sudden shudder on his part broke the spell that held them, and she turned suddenly towards him.

"It is strange that we should meet like this," he said, striving to keep the passionate longing out of his voice. "When we last danced together—do you remember?"

"I remember everything," she answered softly. "It is two years ago now, isn't it?"

"Two years," he repeated, "and to me it seems a lifetime." Then in a different tone. "Are you staying here long?"

"All the winter, I think. They say I must not stay in New York, that I need sunshine."

"You are not ill?" he said sharply.

She smiled. "No, not ill, but I might be if I stayed longer in a cold climate."

"And your work, will you keep that up here? You will not give that up, of course?" he asked, a trace of bitterness creeping into the question.

"For the present, yes, but I hope to go back again to it. It is all I have to live for now, I am quite alone since my father died, and you know I never cared for society."

"I think it was all you ever lived for," he said roughly; "the ruin of a man's life meant nothing to you while you could devote yourself to your art."

She shrank a little from him and her face grew still whiter in the moonlight.

"I suppose you have a right to say that—I do not know—perhaps I was selfish in those days—but I was very young and success when it first comes is sweet to everyone—and how was I to know that you cared any more for me than for any other friend. I did not realise where you were drifting, and so I suppose, you grew to hope for what I had never thought of—then."

"How was I to know that you were so different from all the rest of your sex," he said bitterly, "the rest of the world knew if you did not, and women are not generally so blind in those matters. What does a man usually mean when he follows a woman like a lapdog? You let me wait on you, send you flowers, escort you everywhere—allowed me to go on in a fool's paradise, and then, when you had grown into my life and wound yourself round my heart until life without you seemed impossible, till your face haunted me day and night and my work was dedicated to you and you only, you told me in your calm, sweet way that you did not care for me except as as friend, that you intended to devote your life to art, and that no *man* would ever take its place. God! what are you women made of," he continued, passion getting the mastery of him at last, "you have no more feeling than one of the statues you thought so much of, no more idea of the purgatory you send a man to than those same blocks of marble to which you devoted yourself!"

Sybil Delaunay shivered a little and her figure lost its haughty alertness.

"I — I hoped you had forgotten," she said tremulously.

He laughed bitterly.

"Did you come out here, then?" she asked, trying to keep her voice steady. "I heard you had left New York, but no one seemed to know where you had gone."

"Yes, I left New York, gave up my profession, and came here, as far away as I could get, my one desire being to escape from anything and everything that reminded me of you."

"You live here then?"

"Near here—in the mountains—I have a ranch."

Again a dead silence. He gazed fixedly at the scene before him not trusting himself to look at her face. She did not know that his hands were clenched till the nails cut into the flesh to keep himself from seizing her in his arms and holding her for ever. He did not see that her eyes were full of tears, or notice the trembling of her slight figure.

"You are happy now—you have forgotten," she almost whispered.

"I thought so until to-night. But when I saw you I knew that it was hopeless, that all the flight, the striving to keep back the memories and put you out of my life were in vain. You are and always will be, the one woman in the world for me. I am a fool to tell you I suppose, but what does it matter. I was a fool all through, a blind fool and I have no one but myself to blame. Don't let it worry you, I have managed to go on, I have not shot myself, nor taken to drink nor any of the hundred and one things that a man can do to try to help him to forget."

"Don't you think," she said, a new tone in her voice, and speaking very slowly and softly, "that—if you had waited a little—had not been in such a hurry to get away—it might have been better—women do not always know their own minds, you know."

Her voice was so low that he had to bend down to hear, and then he saw her face, and a light flashed into his own.

He put his hands on her shoulders and turning her round, forced her to meet his eyes.

"Do you mean it—Sybil—oh, my darling, don't mislead me again, don't say it out of pity—or——"

For answer she leant forward and kissed him on the forehead.

Still he held her away from him and continued in the same eager, passionate voice.

"You know what you are doing—you will come to me, live as a rancher's wife in the mountains, give up society, and your work that was so much to you?"

He waited breathlessly for her answer.

She raised her head and through her tears she whispered

"For better or for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health until——"

She got no further for his arms were round her and her face was hidden on his shoulder.

The band still played, and the dancers whirled as they had done half an hour ago. Miss Delaunay's discarded partners searched anxiously for her, and finally and very wisely gave up the search and consoled themselves with less evasive attractions, the moon still shone brightly as ever, and the waves rolled up and broke with their steady monotonous sound, but for the two people standing at the window the world had changed.

Beatrice M. Studdy.

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HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.
BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.
CRAWLEY DRUMMOND. Lady Peggy's old friend and adviser.
DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.
DUCHESS OF EASTACRES. His mother.
DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.
STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister, who visits Cairo.
SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.
ALPHONSE HERVÉ. A celebrated French artist in love with Belinda.
PAUL DE SONNAZ. A young French nobleman and friend of Lady Peggy's.

At Midnight in the Studio.

ALPHONSE HERVÉ'S studio was an annexe of a large old house dating from the picturesque period of Paris, when gallants in velvet doublet and silk hose were beruffled and befrilled as any lady of fashion. The studio was of quite modern date; it had been the workshop of a famous sculptor. Alphonse had enlarged and decorated it almost out of recognition.

The studio opened into a large gymnasium, fitted with all the newest athletic appliances and lit by electric light.

From the gymnasium a door led into the garden, otherwise there was no entrance save through the studio.

It was in this gymnasium that I presumed the Duke and Hervé were about to fight. Belinda gave me a somewhat incoherent account of what had happened. I gathered, however, that Paul de Sonnaz's valet had told my maid, Felicité, that the artist had had words with the Duke that morning, and was going to fight that same night.

Felicité had, of course, imparted the information to Belinda, who in turn inflicted it on me. If Eastacres was going to fight the man, he might, I thought, have managed to keep the affair quiet. It was most disturbing to be called out at twelve o'clock at night to prevent two men flying at each other's throats.

When we arrived at the Rue Royale we found the house in darkness. Repeated rings at the bell and knocks at the door elicited no response. It being evident that there was no admittance that way, we went round the corner, down a side street, to a little door in the wall which opened on a covered passage leading to the studio. This door was reserved for the use of artists' models and Hervé's intimates.

A loud and clanging bell rang as I turned the handle. At the sound, the door of the studio at the end of the passage was cautiously drawn back. We hastened down the passage, and found ourselves confronted by Jean Lefroi—Hervé's valet—at the end.

I gave him no time to question or deliberate, but, with a gesture of command, swept past him, Belinda following close behind.

"Where is your master?" I asked imperatively.

"He is engaged, madam, much, much engaged."

The man's eyes glanced across the room as he spoke. I took the hint, and walked rapidly to the door that led into the gymnasium.

"Open," I called sharply, rapping at the panels, "open at once."

The walls were thick, otherwise I might have heard the substance of the parley that ensued. As it was I only caught a word or two in Hervé's voice.

"I can see no one—make excuse."

The door swiftly opened, was as rapidly shut, and the key turned once more in the lock. Paul de Sonnaz stood before me, a look of surprise on his face. He quickly recovered himself, and with a low bow observed:

"Hervé will be desolated not to see you, Lady Peggy. He——"

"Enough, enough," I interrupted hastily. "Tell me, have they fought, or is it yet to come?"

His face grew anxious, almost perturbed.

"It is useless to try to deceive me, Paul," I cried. "I know as well as you that Hervé and Eastacres fight a duel to-night."

"Then, my dear lady, permit me to ask why you are here?"

For answer I moved aside and pointed to Belinda!

White as death, her eyes full of fear, her mouth set in curves of suspense, her apppearance was an ample reply.

"If I had not come, Belinda would have done so alone," I observed, "and of two evils I chose the lesser. Now, perhaps, you will answer my question. Is Hervé going to fight the Duke?"

Paul made me a sign in the affirmative. Then with a smile bowed over Belinda's hand.

"My dear Lady Peggy," he said softly, "Hervé and the Duke are at this present moment on the best of terms."

"Then it is not true there is to be a duel to-night?" Belinda's blue eyes searched him through and through.

Paul shrugged his shoulders. "Surely not, mademoiselle; consider, is this the time for duels? It is an hour when all just people seek repose. Shall I not take you to your carriage?"

Belinda flushed, threw up her head and turned indignantly on Paul.

"You play with me," she said. "I am not a child to be deceived by foolish excuses, meaningless words. You told me you were my friend."

"To the death, mademoiselle," replied Paul gently.

"And yet, when I ask you a simple question, the answer to

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which means much to me, you quibble, jest, *grimace*—oh, I have no faith in you."

Paul sighed, and looked romantic, but remained inflexible.

"If you only knew how anxious, how cruelly anxious I am," she said, with a suspicious tremor in her voice. "M. Hervé has been so good, so kind to me, that the thought of the danger he is in, or"—she paused—"will be in, is terrible. Ah! monsieur, please tell me what is happening in that other room"—she pointed eloquently to the gymnasium.

Then, clasping her hands about his arm, she gazed up at him with great, appealing eyes.

De Sonnaz was not proof against her pleading.

He flushed and cast a look at me, and then without any more ado shamelessly succumbed.

"I will tell you everything," he said, "if you will promise me to be discreet."

Belinda nodded.

"I'm not quite a fool," she remarked; "I'm not likely to make a scene, or any nonsense of that kind."

"Very good, I shall rely upon your word. There was a disagreement this morning between Alphonse and the Duke in the Bois."

"About me?" interposed Belinda. "I was sure of it."

De Sonnaz shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not at liberty to disclose the matter upon which they disagreed," he said drily. "Alphonse considered himself insulted, and sent a challenge to the Duke, who has accepted it. They fight to-night, the weapons, pistols, the place"—he motioned to the gymnasium—"the hour, within five minutes."

"But M. Hervé cannot shoot a bit," said Belinda; "he told me so when I challenged him to pistol practice at the Baronne's only last week. It will be murder, *murder!*" she repeated. "Eastacres can snuff out a candle with a pistol shot at thirty paces." She flashed a look of indignation towards the room. "Where is this noble English gentleman?"

"The Duke has not yet arrived," said Paul, "he and his second, Colonel Langton, will be here within the next few minutes." He looked at his watch. It was close on one o'clock.

"I shall go to him," said Belinda. "I will tell him what I and every other decent person will say and think of the man who fights a duel with an opponent who can no more shoot than—than Lady Peggy," she cried scornfully.

"Belinda," I interrupted, "you will do nothing of the kind."

"Do you think I can stay here and let a man be murdered in cold blood?" she said, crimson with passion.

"I must remind you of your promise, mademoiselle. You gave me your word to act with discretion. What you propose to do would bring everlasting disgrace upon Hervé. He challenged the Duke, who only acted as a man of honour in accepting the challenge. If you succeed in preventing the duel Alphonse will be covered with ridicule, and he will be accused of sheltering himself behind a woman. Your interference would merely delay matters. We should wait till to-morrow, that is all, and choose a quiet spot in the Bois."

"What can I do?" asked the girl despairingly.

"Return to my aunt's," he said gravely, "and——" he paused, "offer prayers for a brave man's life."

"Are you the Duke's second?" she asked.

"No, mademoiselle, the Duke is my guest; etiquette would forbid it. I am to be present as the friend of both, and now," he took her hand gently in his, "now you will return?"

She hesitated, and then, with an air of resolution, shook her head.

"No," she said firmly, "I shall remain here, not to create a disturbance or to make a scene, but to see fair play. I am resolved, monsieur; here I remain until the end."

At that moment came a knocking at the door of the gymnasium.

"It is the Duke," cried Paul. "I must go," then, stooping towards me, whispered, "You must get her away somehow."

"Is Alphonse likely to be hurt?" I asked.

Paul nodded, and passed into the gymnasium, locking the door behind him.

I looked towards Belinda, who had sunk back into a chair and wondered how I should persuade her to hear reason. I may explain that a close study of Belinda's character had convinced me of the impossibility of leading her in the way she did not wish to go. The only thing to do was to get her there without her knowledge! It was a mad and preposterous thing to have come to the studio on such an errand, and nothing but the certainty that if not with me, she would have started off without me, had induced me to accompany Belinda.

It now remained to take her back to the Hotel D'Arteuil.

"Now, my dear," I said with decision, "we will go to our carriage."

To my surprise she did not make the least demur, but rose and followed me quietly through the door, down the covered passage to the entrance in the wall, and out into the street.

The carriage was waiting for us round the corner of the Rue Royale. Belinda seized my arm and impetuously urged me towards it. Just as we passed the front of the house, I felt her fingers tighten on my arm, and before I had time to remonstrate or resist she had whirled me through the open gates.

"I'm going round to the back," she said, "to see if we can't get into the gymnasium from the garden. It's no use telling me not to, Lady Peggy; I'm sorry to go against what you say, but nothing will keep me back."

"You foolish girl," I cried angrily. "Don't you see what you are doing? You are proclaiming your infatuation for Hervé from the house-tops. It will create a positive scandal."

She dropped my arm and faced me in the darkness.

"You said that once before," she answered quietly. "That time I believed you and did as you asked me; this time I shall judge for myself—I shall go on."

"Do you want the whole world to know you are in love with Hervé?" I sneered. "You transfer your affections very quickly; a little while ago it was David Carr you adored, now——"

"It is still David and always will be," she said passionately. "I have no love for M. Hervé of that sort, but I have a great friendship, affection, if you like, and will not go back on him. David would be the first person to blame me if I did. In my class we don't forsake our friends when they are in danger and difficulty."

She spoke with a force and dignity which I could not contest. Her will was set, I could not turn her purpose, and all I could hope to do would be to guide it.

Together we crept round to the back of the gymnasium and softly tried the door that opened on the garden.

It was fast locked!

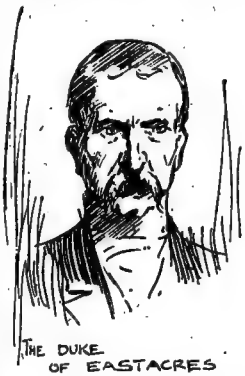
"This way," said Belinda quickly. "We can see what is going on through the window!"

Borne up by her desperate energy, I took my station by her outside the window, some three feet from the ground, and cautiously peered through the glass. The window was slightly open, we could see and hear what was taking place.

In the brilliant, searching light of the electric lamps the room was clear as daylight, but our faces and figures were not discernible, so dark was the night, so heavy the shadows in the garden.

There were six men present, Hervé and the Duke, their seconds, M. de Blouet, a noted duellist, and Colonel Langton, Paul de Sonnaz, and a dark, keen-faced man whom I took to be a doctor.

Breathless we saw the seconds load the pistols, measure the distance between the combatants, saw them thrust the swords into the oak floor to mark each man's position, the physician busy himself with his affairs, then, with fast-beating hearts we saw De Sonnaz advance.



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

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"Is there no hope of a compromise, messieurs?" he said, glancing from Hervé to the Duke.

"None," answered the two men simultaneously, and Paul retired.

"As the challenged in the duel, I claim the right to insist on three rounds," said Eastacres, "provided"—he gave a sneering laugh—"we are both here to fight them out."

De Blouet, Hervé's second, demurred, but the painter hastily interrupted.

"I agree," he said. "Three rounds, or thirty, if you will. Come, let us begin."

The pistols were then presented. Hervé took his carelessly, with a shrug of the shoulders; the Duke took his with the right hand and dropped it softly into his left, dropped it as carefully yet familiarly as only a man can who has known the intimate use of it for years.

Paul de Sonnaz stepped forward.

"Take your places, messieurs," he said gravely; the seconds fell back and the Duke of Eastacres and Alphonse Hervé faced each other. Then—

"I shall have the honour of counting ten," said Paul, "during which time you are required to fire or not at all."

Eastacres, who stood five paces at the back of his sword, remained quite still, his pistol in his left hand.

"One—two—three!"

Hervé sprang forward, aimed carelessly and wildly, his shot flew over the Duke's head and crashed into the oaken panelling. Simultaneously Eastacres, dropping the pistol into his right hand, sent a shot through his adversary's shoulder.

Hervé staggered, De Blouet caught him in his arms, and the physician hastily attended to him. Down the white shirt front crept a thin crimson stream, a stream of blood.

"You are hurt, my friend," said Paul de Sonnaz.

"But little!" The painter straightened himself, and glanced proudly at the Duke.

"If monsieur is recovered," said Eastacres, "we will proceed to the second round."

At this there was a protest from De Blouet, a protest in which De Sonnaz joined.

"If M. Hervé will make an apology to me for his insolence to me this morning, and will undertake to cease annoying a certain lady with his unwelcome attentions, I am prepared to forego the last two rounds," the Duke said.

Hervé laughed scornfully.

"To apologise to you," he said, "would be an infamy to which death is a trifle. Proceed—we will fight to the end!"

Once again the pistols were loaded, once again the seconds fell back, the combatants faced each other.

Belinda, who up to now had kept perfectly quiet, showed signs of agitation.

"Do you think," she said, seizing me in a firm grip, "do you think the Duke means to *kill* Hervé?"

"Not for an instant," I replied; "he will disable him."

"I will let them fight this round," she said between her teeth, "in the hope that Alphonse may hurt him, after——" She paused, Eastacres was speaking.

"Monsieur, I warn you," he said calmly, "that in the next round I shall smash your left hand. In the third"—he paused—"your right. Consider, is not your reputation as a painter worth an apology and a promise?"

It is impossible to describe the insolence, the contempt of the speech. He spoke to Hervé as a man speaks to his slave or to his dog. De Blouet went scarlet, Langton, the Duke's own second, interposed.

"You are here to fight, not to talk, Eastacres," he said, sternly; "go on with the business—if you are resolved," and he gave a gesture of repugnance.

Again the shots rang out upon the night. Hervé's left hand hung limp and useless at his side; from the Duke's arm trickled a streak of blood.

"Thank Heaven for it," cried Belinda.

"A mere scratch," remarked the Duke, handing his handkerchief to Langton.

"Well, M. Hervé," he asked sneering, "will you apologise *now?*"

"Never!" was the answer—"*never!*"

Then the Duke raised his pistol significantly.

"Say farewell to your art, monsieur. At present you cannot hold a palette, in a second you will never again finger a brush." He leant forward, his face awful with hate, his cold eyes gleaming like points of steel.

Hervé, white to the lips with pain and loss of blood, rallied at the insult.

"If I lose my hands," he answered, "I shall still have my tongue, my brain, my energy, my force of will, and all and every one of these shall be employed against you, coward, liar, scoundrel!" He flung out the words like blows, then reeling, leant against De Blouet.

"Make haste," he murmured, pointing to the pistols—"make haste, reload—I faint—I die—almost."

For a moment De Blouet hesitated to allow the last round to be fought; it was like countenancing a crime. The Duke would keep his word, Hervé would lose his hand—he would be infinitely poorer by the loss. Never to paint again, never to fix in glowing colours on a cold, grey canvas, the glory of the sunset, the blue of God's Heaven, the flower-like beauty of a woman's face.

"The pistol," gasped Hervé; once again his second, pale as death, loaded and handed it to him.

"One!" said De Sonnaz, in a low hoarse voice. The Duke and Hervé remained motionless.

"Two!" each raised their pistol.

"Three!" The Duke covered Hervé's right hand, the hand that, famous throughout the world, might the next moment for ever lose its cunning.

"Four!" On the instant Belinda stooping caught up a stone from off the garden path, and sent it whizzing through the window. The crash of the falling glass caused all the men to start. Even as Eastacres pressed the trigger, the pistol dropped to the floor—exploding as it fell.

Belinda followed quickly on her missile, and flinging up the window, she vaulted lightly over the sill into the room.

It was a dramatic scene. The huge room blazing with light, against which the black coats of the men looked even darker. The smoking pistols, the blood-stained floor, the look of apprehension and alarm upon the faces of all present as Belinda, drawn to her full height, her blue eyes flaming, her cheeks flushed, stood like a goddess of vengeance before them!

"Coward!" she said, pointing to the Duke. "Coward! If I were but a man I'd shoot you to the heart for shame of the manhood you've disgraced! Do you suppose I don't know *why* he challenged you?" she asked, her young voice ringing with scorn. "You spoke of me with insult, and he—took up my cause."

Then wheeling swiftly round, she pointed to Hervé, supported by De Sonnaz and the doctor.

"If he dies," she said, "I will not rest till you are punished."

"Your concern for M. Hervé is astonishing," said the Duke. "I trust he will prove grateful for your solicitude."

Belinda paid no heed to this remark, but, crossing to Hervé, bent over him, clasping his hand—the hand that she had saved. As she knelt there, the tears started to her eyes, but there was never a tremor in her voice, when next she spoke.

"Messieurs," she said proudly, "perhaps you think that I should not be here? It seems strange to you that a girl like me should interfere in a scene like this. I will tell you why I came."

Her French was of the grammar-book, prim and precise, but her voice was sweet and thrilling, and touched the heart of every Frenchman present.

"I came, messieurs, because"—she paused—"M. Hervé is my friend," she said, "and the friend of the man I love!"

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I gasped, the men stared, Hervé smiled.

Belinda had done this mad, most audacious thing from *friendship*—not love!

"Happy is the man with such a friend," said De Sonnaz gravely. There was a little murmur of applause.

The doctor, unlike the rest of the men, thinking more of his patient than Belinda, noticed a change in Hervé's face.

In an instant the room was cleared, Paul and De Blouet alone remaining. The rest of us were shut in the studio. Langton, feeling the awkwardness of the situation, bowed to me, gave a frigid salutation to Eastacres, and, with a profound obeisance to Belinda, departed. Hoping the Duke would follow his example, I advanced to bid him "good-night."

"I am not going just at present," he said quickly. "I have first to speak to Miss North. Listen!"—he came close to Belinda, and before she realised what he was about to do, clasped her two wrists in his strong, cruel-looking hands. "No," as she tried to shake herself free, "I don't mean to release you, till you've heard what I have to say. You can't get away by yourself, if you call for help you'll frighten your friend," he sneered evilly, "and Lady Peggy has too much sense to interfere. I am your master now as I shall be always. I mean to marry you, I *shall* marry you. The longer the delay the more you will suffer. You shall belong to me, and to no other man. You shall have no friends, no lovers, no admirers—I will fight them one by one. After this I shall not wound but kill. Henceforth if you so much as smile on any man but me you sign his death-warrant. You hear me?"

"Yes, and regard you as little as the wind; I shall never marry you; I would rather die."

"Even so, you will be my wife." His fingers tightened on her wrists, his face set in a sneering smile, bent over her. He was hurting her cruelly, horribly, as I could see.

"Eastacres, stop," I cried, and laid my hand upon his arm. He paid no heed to me, but gripped her soft, slim wrists until her face grew livid with the pain. I tried to tear his hands away. I even beat them with my own, I might as well have dashed myself against a wall.

At last, with a sneering laugh, he let her go. She staggered and would have fallen, had I not caught her in my arms.

"Whenever you look at those little soft white hands, you will remember what I say," he added; "you will be my wife. You cannot help yourself, and no man will dare to help you. Who would risk crossing me after to-night?" and he glanced towards the room where Hervé lay—grievously hurt.

Even as he was speaking the studio door opened and a man walked quickly into the room.

"I dare!" he said, and calmly faced the Duke. "I—Stanley Forbes!" and the Duke fell back.

(Another powerful instalment will appear next week. I shall be very glad to have the candid opinions of readers regarding this series. Such opinions are of great value in deciding whether the matter I am giving you is appreciated or not.—Ed "S.S.")

£50 FROM ONE READER TO THE REST.

A reader of SHORT STORIES won a prize of £10 in 1894 and with the help of this money emigrated to America, making a fortune out of the cycle boom of 1897 and 1898. He recently wrote a letter, under the *nom-de-plume* of "Dayton," to the Editor of SHORT STORIES, enclosing dollar bills to the value of £50, and asking that this money may be offered as prizes in five sums of £10 each.

The Editor has given the matter very careful consideration, and has arrived at the conclusion that, as his anonymous correspondent was in great want when he won his prize, the most satisfactory manner of distributing his gift of £50 would be to offer it to those who can give me the best reason for receiving it.

You may be wanting to emigrate to one of our Colonies. You may want £10 to buy something you have needed for a long time. You may want to clear off some small debts that have been worrying you. Or you may want to trade with the £10 and, like "Dayton," turn it into a fortune.

Whatever your reason for wanting it may be, write it down in the space below, and send it to "The Competition Editor of SHORT STORIES," Henrietta Street, London, W.C., in an envelope marked "Dayton 2."

Readers may send as many reasons as they like, provided each is written on a separate coupon. Another coupon will appear next week. The Editor's decision is final, and competitors may enter only on this understanding.

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The Chronicles o' Glencrackit.

BY G. VINCENT-HOLYTOWN.

No. 1.—MacTaggart's "First-Fit."

Amongst the quaint customs peculiar to Scotland, the genial practice of first-footing one's neighbours on the birth of the New Year is too well-known to need much explanation.

Suffice it to say that the fortunes of each household during the ensuing twelve months depend absolutely upon the manner of person who first crosses the threshold (from the outside) after the midnight hour has tolled the departure of the old year.

With the family fortunes hanging upon the fateful visitor, the nature of that visitor's coming is a matter of anxiety for all concerned. In many cases the fortune-bringer is carefully arranged for beforehand, for there are certain things a good first-foot must—and must not—be.

The first-foot must, above all things, be a man. No more disastrous start could be made for the year than the first crossing of the threshold by a woman. The first-foot should also be tall and dark, strong rather than handsome, and of military bearing, with well-shod feet turned out at the proper angle, for hen-toed men are an abomination. He must not squint, nor come empty-handed, for the prosperity of the house depends upon his bringing a gift, no matter how trivial, for his hosts.

* * * * *

The Old Year had barely an hour to live, and Sandy MacTaggart was seated chatting with his wife and daughter by the side of a cheerful fire, waiting to see the New Year in.

Suddenly he remembered that he had not arranged for an acceptable first-foot, and with a horror-stricken expression, he jumped from his chair.

"Weel, I declare," he exclaimed, "if I hadna clean forgotten tae tryst a guid first-fit till this very meenit. I maun awa' tae Glencrackit and bespeak Jimmie Niven or some ither proper man at once."

Nancy MacTaggart and her mother exchanged glances full of meaning, and then Mrs. MacTaggart spoke:

"Sit ye doon, guid man, and let come wha likes; it's far luckier tae ha'e your first-fit vecsit ye kin' o' spontaneous——"

"Wumman," replied MacTaggart sternly, "would ye leave sic an important item o' oor destiny tae a mere chance, tae the whim o' a wanderin' neighbour, tae the caprice o' a casual tramp——"

"Saunders MacTaggart," interposed his wife reproachfully. "I wonder at ye, an Elder o' the Kirk, letting your superstseetion get the better o' your judgment."

"Jean MacRae," retorted Sandy (who, when on his dignity with his wife, invariably called her by her maiden name), "Jean MacRae, o' all men breathin', I am the least superstseetious, but on questions o' cause and effect I can be logical, which nae wumman could ever be. What I'm determined tae arrange, in spite o' ye, is that nae hen-taed, squint-e'ed, decrepit, empty-handed albino shatters my peace o' mind for the comin' year. And yet ye would ha'e me sit doon and let the wind blaw in what it likes. Ay, it's weel for ye all that Saunders MacTaggart can be loyal tae his convictions and his duty."

With this oracular utterance, MacTaggart strode to the door.

His pretty daughter, Nancy, hesitated a moment, and then flew to his side, with the words:

"Father, you needn't worry yourself about it. It's too bad to let you go down to the village this bitter night when I feel sure—that is, mother and I think—in fact, we are certain—oh, mother, why don't you tell him?"

She broke off in flushed confusion and MacTaggart looked from his daughter to his wife in blank amazement.

"What's the lass ravin' aboot?" he queried in bewilderment.

Mrs. MacTaggart set her lips hard, for a pitched battle of words was at hand, and she knew it. She had already fought a preliminary engagement with Nancy, had succumbed, and was now loyally ranged on her daughter's side. She was prepared, indeed, to bear the brunt of the fighting.

"She's no ravin'," she said sharply, "she's tellin' ye that there's sure tae be a proper first-fit without you botherin' yoursel' aboot him."

"Hoo dae ye ken?" inquired MacTaggart, in tones of cold suspicion.

"Because we've arranged for him," was his wife's decisive reply.

Saunders MacTaggart perceived at this juncture the imminence of some sort of an attack by the allied forces of his wife and daughter, and like a wise general he immediately seized all available strategic points.

"I thocht ye said it was far luckier tae ha'e your first-fit vee-sit ye' kin' o' spontaneous. Are ye sure ye kent the meaning o' the word when ye used it?"

Saunders MacTaggart had addressed these words to his wife with studied and withering deliberation, but he was promptly countered by his daughter.

"Yes, father, she meant what she said. Our first-foot is coming of his own suggestion. Indeed, he asked our permission to come. One volunteer is worth ten pressed men, so we arranged it beforehand."

The argument was unanswerable, and therefore unsatisfactory to Mr. MacTaggart.

"Hoo am I tae ken if he's a fit and proper man?" he demanded, with a searching look at his daughter.

Realising that there was a sweetheart in the case, he switched on another current of meaning through his next words. "Ye're far o'er young tae be thinkin' o' lads yet, my lassie, and I maun hold your mother responsible for allowing any sic developments tae transpire without my knowledge and consent."

He turned to note the effect of his peroration on Mrs. MacTaggart. No particular effect being visible and no reply forthcoming, he added grandly:

"Dae ye hear those words, Jean MacRae?"

"I do, Saunders MacTaggart, they're simply magneeficent. Are ye sure ye kent the meaning o' them when ye used them?"

"Oh, mother dear, don't quarrel, please," intervened Nancy, viewing with some anxiety her mother's tendency to forget, in the heat of a general engagement, the real issue at stake. "Tell father who is coming, he has a right to know."

Matters might have made much better progress if Nancy had made the dreaded revelation herself. Saunders MacTaggart was easily led by his daughter, and indeed by his wife too, only his wife liked to drive, and Saunders MacTaggart would not be driven.

As it was he braced himself up for resistance under any circumstances.

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In response to Nancy's request, Mrs. MacTaggart snapped out the bald announcement :

"Young Angus Colquhoun."

Saunders MacTaggart raised his hands in speechless horror. His dramatic silence (whether real or affected) had considerable effect on his wife, for she continued hurriedly, and almost apologetically ;

"He's after oor Nance, and he's a decent enough chap. Ye needna think that because auld Angus Colquhoun and yoursel' canna agree, the young generation are goin' tae perpetuate your private quarrels."

Here Saunders MacTaggart found his voice, and used it with no uncertain sound.

"Jean MacRae," he thundered, "daur ye stand there and disgrace the prood name I consented tae share wi' ye twenty-five years syne? Dae ye even suggest the possibeelity o', an alliance between a MacTaggart o' Tullywhoop and a Colquhoun o' Aberquiech? For four hunder' years there's been an undying feud between the MacTaggarts and the Colquhouns, and far be it frae me and auld Angus Colquhoun tae profane oor ancestral enmity wi' the alliance ye seem tae contemplate wi' sic callous complacency. Avaunt, ye female apostates, begone," he bellowed, as his wife and daughter clung to an arm each, and endeavoured to calm the choler of his words, "nae female blandishments ha'e power tae destroy within me the speerit o' my forefathers."

Here he paused for words and his wife got a chance.

"Saunders MacTaggart, ye just rave o'er naething."

"What, Jean MacRae, dae ye call half-an-acre o' arable land naething? Does the law coont it naething? Have we no' already contested seeven law suits tae decide whether it shall come intae the richtful possession o' the MacTaggarts, or remain in the wrongous clutches o' the Colquhouns?"

"But, father," implored Nancy, "Angus—that is, young Mr. Colquhoun—says five minutes' friendly talk could settle the whole thing out of hand. He has told his father that, too, and half persuaded him already. You should let him speak to you about it."

"Never!" interrupted Mr. MacTaggart inflexibly, "I'm prood tae state, on behalf o' my hereditary foe, auld Angus Colquhoun, and mysel', that we havena spoken a ceevil word to one another since we could speak ava', and I'm no' goin' tae begin wi' the son."

"But you won't actually refuse to speak to him when he comes to first-foot you and wish you a happy new year, will you, father?"

The girl's eyes were tearful now, and MacTaggart weakened perceptibly.

"I w'u'dna actually refuse tae speak tae him, seeing he's coming wi' the express permission o' your mother and yoursel', but as it happens I'm no' goin' tae sit up and see the new year in, so ye maun just dispense the hospitality o' the hoose yoursel's, when he comes."

The faces of both mother and daughter clouded. They had won their victory, but it bade fair to be a barren one. The enemy was destroying all that was worth capturing before surrendering.

Mrs. MacTaggart made one more effort to retain her lord's presence to receive young Colquhoun.

"W'u'd ye no like tae see your first-fit? He's a good-lookin' lad, an' ye've never met him yet."

"No," replied MacTaggart tartly. "First-fittin's a heathenish custom at the best, and I leave ye tae perform your idolatrous rites yoursel's," and so saying he stalked majestically out of the room.

The moment he had gone, Nancy flung herself upon her mother's neck and wept—and was consoled.

* * * * *

It was simply out of the question that MacTaggart could so lightly abandon the cherished custom of watching for his first-foot, and, as a matter of fact, he had no intention of missing the event at all. His retreat was a merely strategic one. He certainly went to his room, opened the door, slammed it hard, and locked it with ostentatious noise, but he performed all these operations from the outside.

Then he slipped off his boots and carefully hid them. After that he dexterously swung himself into the loft, which exists in most one-storied houses of the Tullywhoop Farm type.

A square opening about three feet wide was let into the ceiling just inside the front door directly over the entrance-lobby.

Over the edge of this trap he could get a splendid view of his first-foot, and the proceedings generally, and he lay there like a cat watching for a mouse. After he had lain awhile in ambush he glanced at his watch by the light of the hall-lamp, and noted that it only wanted a couple of minutes to midnight.

From his perch he could already hear the shuffling of footsteps outside, and from that sound he gathered that his first-foot was there ready for action.

Then the hour of twelve struck on the hall-clock, and immediately the sound ceased, a loud knock at the door raised his excitement to fever-pitch.

Mrs. MacTaggart appeared from the parlour, followed by Nancy, both with smiling faces, ready to welcome their visitor.

The door opened and the ladies uttered a startled exclamation as a gigantic man, carrying with evident exertions an enormous box, staggered across the threshold shouting, "A happy new year to one and all of you!"

Obviously the first-foot was not the man they had expected, but he was warmly welcomed nevertheless.

With staring eyes MacTaggart gazed blinkingly at the newcomer, who was all that could be desired as a first-foot, six feet five in his boots, black-haired, straight-limbed, jovial, hale and hearty. It was his minister, the Rev. Marmion MacIvor, by whom, of all persons, he desired to be respected.

"Where's the good man?" demanded the reverend first-foot as he deposited his burden on the floor, and shook hands with Mrs. MacTaggart and Nancy.

"He's rather indisposed to-night, sir," replied Mrs. MacTaggart meekly.

"Rouse him up, good wife, rouse him up to feast his eyes on the biggest first-foot gift he ever got. Rouse him up, it will do him good!"

As he spoke he tore off the lid of the box, and there stood revealed to the astonished gaze of at least three pairs of eyes, a quantity of some substance that looked like newly-dug earth.

MacTaggart's curiosity caused him to over-reach himself, his hand slipped, and down he crashed into the box.

The women shrieked and the minister started at the unexpected visitation, and MacTaggart picked himself up with rueful gravity.

"Oh, you're there, are you, Saunders?" said the minister. "Allow me to present you with your first-foot gift, being the biggest sample I could carry of half an acre of arable land that has been in dispute for some little time. The land is now made over in its entirety to yourself by Angus Colquhoun, senior, of Aberquiech, who is here, with his son, to attest my words, with the deeds. Step forward, there, Colquhoun, shake hands with MacTaggart, and bury your enmity for ever in this earth!"

Of course, with such a splendid first-foot as the Reverend Marmion MacIvor, whose good offices had been secured by young Angus Colquhoun, with the approval of his father, the ensuing year was a specially propitious one for all concerned. The alliance by marriage of the MacTaggarts of Tullywhoop with the Colquhouns of Aberquiech is now an accomplished fact, accomplished in person by the reverend first-foot.

The following Tartans have already appeared on the covers of "Short Stories":

No. 1.—MENZIES	...	...	*Issue dated August 2nd, 1902.*
No. 2.—MACPHERSON	...	,,	*August 16th, 1902.*
No. 3.—MACLEOD	...	,,	*September 13th, 1902.*
No. 4.—ROB ROY	...	,,	*October 4th, 1902.*
No. 5.—MACMILLAN	...	,,	*October 25th, 1902.*
No. 6.—MACDONALD of SLEAT		,,	*November 29th, 1902.*

Back numbers can always be had on application to these offices.

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A Literary Theft.

AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

In the small sitting-room of a modest little cottage situated in one of the least pretentious thoroughfares of Highgate, a middle-aged woman was sitting before the fire, and glancing ever and anon through the pretty curtained window which looked out upon the street. Presently the object of her thoughts appeared, walking briskly over the clean, wind-swept pavement, and soon after entered the room and divested herself of her hat and coat.

It was a frosty morning in November, and the girl's face glowed with healthy exhilaration after her walk, while her blue eyes sparkled with unusual animation. As she entered the room, however, her eyes fell on the little table which stood near her mother's chair, and the whole expression of her face changed to bitter disappointment and anxiety. The mother looked up quickly, and a look of tender sympathy shone in her eyes as she read her daughter's distress. Going up to the table, the girl picked up two foolscap envelopes, directed to herself, which had come by post during her absence. With indifferent fingers—for she well knew what they contained—she broke the seals and drew from each a folded manuscript.

A slip of paper lay in each manuscript, with the usual form of rejection: "The Editor presents his compliments and regrets his inability——" and so on. With a sigh she laid the papers down upon the table and looked anxiously into her mother's face.

"You do not look so well this afternoon, mother," she said. "Has this troubled you as well?" And she pointed to the rejected manuscripts.

"Your disappointments are mine, dear," said the mother, "and, like you, I had so hoped that one at least would have met with success."

The girl sighed.

"A year or two ago," she said, "my stories quickly found a good market, but latterly successes have been few. I must have lost the knack of writing, I think, for even I am conscious of the difference between my present work and what I used to turn out."

"It is not that you have lost the knack, dear, for your genius is as unquestionable to-day as ever it was," replied the mother, looking at her daughter with evident pride. "No," she continued, "you have lost nothing. But the past year has brought with it many anxieties, many dark forebodings of the future, many pressing needs which cannot be supplied, and all these things have weighed upon you and robbed your stories of their brightness and colour, until their vitality has almost disappeared. Do not think me cruel for saying this, dear Jessie, for I am only impelled to do so by the knowledge that to thus wound you would be infinitely better than to see you lose all faith in the abilities which, notwithstanding these bitter disappointments, you still possess, and thereby sink into lethargy and despair."

The girl looked gratefully into her mother's face.

"I think you are right, dear mother," she said, "and it is nice to know that someone believes in me in spite of all these recent failures." And she laid her head lovingly on her mother's shoulder. "But it is not my failure alone which troubles me, but what it entails. I called in to see the doctor while I was out, and asked him to tell me the truth about you. He says there is no immediate danger, but that, unless precautionary measures are at once adopted, he cannot answer for the consequences. Your recent affection of the throat, together with the weak state of your general health, make it imperative that you should enjoy a change of air. He recommends Ventnor, and declares I must send you there at once for six weeks at least. If this is done, he says, you will speedily recover your former health."

The girl paused and looked into the fire. "And I promised," she added in a low voice, "that you should go."

For some moments there was silence in the little room, broken only by the ticking of a gilt clock on the mantelpiece. Then the mother took the girl's head, with its cluster of brown curls, between her white hands, and kissed the troubled face with loving tenderness.

"My child," she said soothingly, "do not worry about it. I believe a way will be opened, although I cannot see how or what it will be, and some day we shall look back at these troubles of to-day and wonder why our faith in the future was so feeble as to make them oppress us so heavily. Now I will go and lie down till tea is ready, and in the evening we will talk over your two stories. Perhaps I may be able to suggest some way of improving them, and, if not, at any rate my sympathy may stimulate your greater ability to the accomplishment of the same end." And once more kissing her daughter's cheek, she left the room.

Left to herself, and feeling unfit for work, the girl took down an old number of the *American Monthly Magazine* and idly turned over the pages. It was five years old, and had been sent her by a cousin residing in New York because of an article which it contained written by a friend of hers.

Upon its arrival, Jessie Verrall had read the article in question, but, though she had preserved the magazine ever since, she had not even glanced at the rest of the contents. She looked at the titles of the short stories which it contained, until she came to one entitled "An Act of Dishonour." Carelessly she began to read, and, with the full flowing sentences, a living interest in the characters of the story grew up within her and absorbed her whole attention. More and more potent became the fascination of its influence as the girl read on—each incident standing out in bold relief, each word of its intensely impressive dialogue stamped with the hall-mark of truth, and each touch of pathos drawing the tears to her eyes. Spellbound she read on to the end, and then let the magazine fall in her lap.

"Oh, if I could but write like that!" she said with a sigh. "The editor does not live who could reject such a story. I wonder who wrote it!" She turned back to the title. It was signed "Pentaur." "'Pentaur,'" she said to herself. "It sounds like a man. I suppose he is an American, for the story has never appeared in any London magazine."

She stopped, and a strange expression came into her blue eyes. A thought seemed to have come to her—a thought that startled her and sent the warm blood to her face. She put the book on the table, and, rising, began to pace the room in nervous excitement. A frightened look came into her eyes as she walked to and fro, and her breath came short and quick.

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Presently she stopped, and, glancing round as if fearful of being observed, looked again at the date of the magazine.

"Five years," she whispered. "Who would know? If it were for myself I would not think of it, but for her—for her—She *must* go to Ventnor at any cost! But it is horrible! And yet there is no other way. Oh, what shall I do?"

Her eye fell on the title which stood out in black type at the head of the story, and she shrank back with a low cry. "'An Act of Dishonour!'" she gasped. "Oh, I dare not—I dare not!" She started, and, going towards the door, listened intently. Up the stairs of the little cottage, she heard her mother coughing—a hard, racking cough that frightened the girl. She turned about and looked once more at the open pages of the magazine. "Oh, my God!" she moaned, putting her hands before her crimson face, "it is my shame—or—her life! No one will ever know and I only will bear the burden of my guilt. I must—yes, I must!"

With flaming cheeks and nervous fingers she carried the magazine over to her typewriter, which stood on a little table in one corner of the room, and her fingers were soon flying over the keys, while the same story, with the same title, grew out of the white sheets which she slipped into the machine. At the end of an hour and a half the task was completed, and, still with trembling fingers, she collated and fastened together the sheets of the story, signed the title-page with her own name, directed an envelope to a second-rate journal, and, putting on her hat, went out to post it. Once only did she pause, when she stood in the narrow passage with the letter held tightly in her hand. But again the sound of that racking cough from the room upstairs decided her.

"For her sake," she whispered, and closed the door behind her.

When she returned, she again took up the magazine, and, after a moment's reflection, carefully cut out the pages containing the story and thrust them, one by one, into the glowing fire. Then, replacing the magazine upon the shelf from which it had been taken, she sank into a chair and tried to think more calmly.

"'An Act of Dishonour,'" she murmured again, as if the title had for her a terrible and irresistible fascination. "I wonder," she continued after a brief pause, "what would be done to me if by any chance the truth were discovered. I know it would be termed 'infringement of copyright' in legal phraseology, but most people would give it an uglier name. But it cannot—it is almost impossible to be discovered. I must not think of it. It is for my mother's sake—for my mother's life—I do it, and she is all I have in the world!"

After tea, Mrs. Verrall joined her daughter in the sitting-room, and again proposed that they should together reread and discuss the two rejected stories which still lay upon the table. But the proposition met with no response from the silent girl. For the first time in all her life, she found herself afraid to meet her mother's eyes.

"My head aches," she said, with a little forced smile. "I think I will go to bed early."

Mrs. Verrall went to her daughter and kissed her, but the girl shivered at the caress and turned away her head.

"You are not yourself to-night, dear," said the mother gently. "Several things have happened to-day, and you are unstrung. But you will be all right again in the morning, and more enthusiastic about your work." She took up a book as she spoke, and settled herself in an easy-chair.

For some moments Jessie sat gazing into the glowing fire-light, until, afraid even of her own reflections, she too took up a book and attempted to read. But the story, though a good one, failed to engross her. Time after time she found herself wandering from the narrative to that other story, "An Act of Dishonour," and its shameful sequel. She was conscious, too, that her mother glanced up, from time to time, at her troubled face, and she grew nervous under the scrutiny.

At last she rose with a sigh, and, kissing her mother's cheek, bade her good-night and retired to her own room. But all through that night the consciousness of what she had done kept her from sleep, and though again and again she whispered to herself "For her sake—for her sake!" the words brought small comfort to the troubled girl. She was only five-and-twenty, and this was her first deviation from the path of rectitude. What untold torments do we not suffer when conscience lashes us for the first secret sin of our youth! But the morning came at last, and with it, sleep for the weary girl, and when she again awoke, it was broad day, and she rose refreshed and comforted in body, if not in mind.

Thus the days went by. Eagerly and sometimes apprehensively, she watched the post. Morning after morning she took the few letters which the post had brought her and tore them open with trembling fingers. And at last the one she hoped for, and yet dreaded, came, and a cheque fluttered on the floor. The letter which accompanied it was full of high commendation for the excellent story she had submitted, his appreciation of which the editor desired to practically acknowledge, by doubling the usual sum paid for short stories and by warmly inviting her to submit others.

The girl sat very still when she had read the letter, and a confusion of emotions passed through her

She glanced round as if fearful of being seen. "The story is five years old," she whispered; "nobody would know."

mind. How sweet would have been these commendations had they been honestly earned! Now, they only served to increase her shame. The coveted cheque had come, and for even a larger amount than she had dared to hope, and her mother could now go away where life and health would be restored. But the cheque meant the publication of the stolen story, and this awoke anew the dread of the shameful humiliation which would be hers when the discovery came.

While the acceptance of the story still hovered in uncertainty, she had almost persuaded herself that discovery was impossible. But now that she realised it would soon be scattered broadcast over the whole country, the dread of detection took fresh hold upon her and sent a chill of fear through her veins. With an effort, however, she stifled the many voices that seemed to clamour within her, and, picking up the cheque, she went to her mother's room.

"Mother," she said, trying to control her voice, "I wrote a story a week or so ago which I kept from you. It is a good deal better than any of my recent work, and it has been accepted. Here is the cheque for it, with which you will be able to start for Ventnor as soon as you like." There was a deep flush on her face as she spoke, but the fond mother attributed this to the excitement of the occasion and the joy which she knew her daughter must feel in giving her this good news.

"God bless you, my child!" she said, with tears in her eyes as she threw her arms about her daughter's neck and kissed her tenderly. "I said it would come. And this is the very best way in which it could come, because it is through you, dear."

The tears were in the girl's eyes also as she put out her arms and clung passionately to her mother—tears that would not be denied, but gushed out unhindered, while great sobs shook the slender frame. But with the tears came relief to the overwrought brain, and she grew more composed as the day advanced, helping her mother to pack and in other ways prepare for the journey which was before her.

The next day Mrs. Verrall took an affectionate leave of her daughter, and was soon travelling down to Ventnor. She had stayed there before, and therefore knew just where to go to obtain the rest and quiet of which she stood so much in need. So Jessie returned alone to the solitary little cottage in Highgate, and tried to find distraction in the production of new stories and in the improvement of the old. So the days went by, and, to her surprise, she felt her old power returning. Nor was the cause of this far to seek, for each day that sped by after the appearance of the story she had appropriated lessened the danger of detection, while the constant letters from Ventnor told of her mother's returning health and the delights of the long holiday she was enjoying.

Five weeks had slipped by since Mrs. Verrall's departure, and Jessie had almost lost the terrible dread which had haunted her, keeping only the shame and dishonour, which she felt could never fade from her memory, when a letter was delivered to her. Tearing it open, she read the following:

Office of "The Censor,"
95 & 97, *Desborough Street,*
Strand, W.C.

MADAM,—*I have been greatly interested by the story which appeared some weeks ago in the* "Metropolitan Magazine," *entitled* "*An Act of Dishonour.*" *As you are doubtless aware, our terms are considerably above those of the above-named magazine, and if you would favour us by submitting an occasional short story for publication in* "The Censor," *I shall be happy to personally and carefully consider them. Perhaps you might find time to call at this office, when we might discuss a few preliminaries. Yours faithfully,*

MAX ORMOND (Editor).

When she had read the letter, the girl glanced across at the little table upon which stood her typewriting machine. At one side lay a pile of manuscripts, the upper one of which contained a story she had finished only the previous day. She knew it to be the best thing she had written for many months, and, after a moment's reflection, she decided to take it herself to the office of *The Censor*. Accordingly about eleven o'clock she put on her hat and proceeded in that direction, with the manuscript clasped tightly in her hand. She was admitted at once to the editor's room, and Max Ormond—the well known author-editor of *The Censor*—bowed to her as she entered.

"Miss Verrall, I believe?" he said as he motioned her to a chair. "I am glad you have come, for I have been quite curious to see you since I saw 'An Act of Dishonour' in *The Metropolitan*."

The girl flushed.

"It is very good of you," she said in a low tone, "and I could do nothing else but readily respond to the invitation conveyed in your letter."

"Invitation? Ah, yes, I remember. Have you done anything else in the same style as 'An Act of Dishonour'? If so, I should like to see it."

"I finished a story yesterday," replied the girl, "and I think it is one of the best I have as yet turned out. If you would care to look it over——" And she put the folded manuscript on the table in front of the editor.

"Thank you," he said. "If you are not in a hurry, I shall be glad to do so." He turned and whispered a few words to his secretary, who immediately left the room. Then, once more turning to the girl, he said, "Perhaps you might amuse yourself with a magazine while I read your manuscript. Here is one in which you may find something to interest you."

The girl took the magazine he handed her, and, seeing that Max Ormond began at once to read her story, she turned over the pages and glanced at the titles. Something about them seemed familiar, but at first she could not tell what. Then a dreadful suspicion flashed upon her, and she hurriedly turned over the pages until she came to what she dreaded. For there, as in her own copy, she read the title "An Act of Dishonour—By Pentaur." It was another copy of the same old number of the *American Monthly Magazine*. A groan escaped her lips, and, letting the book fall to the floor, she sat there, trembling and bewildered, not even daring to move. Max Ormond appeared not to notice her agitation, but went on persistently reading the manuscript before him, and it was not until he had reached the last word that he lifted his head and looked at the terrified girl.

For some moments neither spoke a word. With searching, penetrating eyes, Max Ormond regarded the girl before him as though he would read her inmost soul. Then he spoke, firmly but gently, in words that left no doubt in the girl's mind that he knew all the terrible truth.

"Tell me," he said, "for I must know—why did you do it?"

The girl covered her face with her hands and was silent.

"I must know," the editor went on. "And I have a right to ask the question, for—I am 'Pentaur.'"

"I did it," she said, dropping her hands and looking at him through the tears which dimmed her blue eyes—"I did it because I knew that the money I should thus obtain would save the life of the only living creature in all the world who is dear to me—my mother! I used to write well at one time, and reaped success after success. But trouble and anxiety have robbed my work of its charm and its power, and failure and disappointment have met me at every turn."

"But what is this you say about your mother?" asked the editor.

"My mother has been ill," replied the girl, "and her doctor told me that she would die if she did not have immediate rest and change of air. If she went away at once, her life would be saved, but if not, there was no hope. It was that which drove me to it, for my mother's life is dearer to me than my own honour."

Again there was silence in the room.

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"There is one other question I must ask," said Max Ormond presently. "It is one I have no personal right to put to you, but the answer must necessarily influence my view of the matter. Tell me—honestly and without prevarication—is this the only story you have appropriated, or are there any others which you have similarly treated?"

"This is the only one," said the girl in a voice that shook with emotion. "And God knows how great is the mountain of guilt which that one has heaped upon me."

"You swear it?"

"Yes."

Max Ormond breathed a sigh of relief.

"I cannot but believe," he said, "that you speak the truth. This thing that you have done would be a sufficient excuse for a contrary opinion. But to me your words carry conviction, and I believe you. It is fortunate that the copyright of the story in question is still in my hands, so that I am the only person to whom you are responsible for its misappropriation. And I, well, I should be less than a gentleman if I did not view your act in the light of its motive, and free you from all further anxiety in the matter." He took a sheet of paper from the rack before him as he spoke, and hurriedly wrote a few words upon it, signing his name at the foot.

"This paper," he said, as he handed it to her, "transfers to you the copyright of 'An Act of Dishonour,' and I have dated it prior to the publication of the story in the *Metropolitan Magazine*. You need, therefore, have no further misgivings on that score. I would extract from you a promise that you would never again act in this way, no matter what were the circumstances or the motives which actuated you, but I think this is unnecessary—first because it is all too evident that your punishment has been heavier than you ever anticipated; and secondly, because, while you can conceive such stories as the one you have brought me this morning you will have no need to appropriate other people's. I shall accept this story, and will send you a cheque as soon as it is published. Please let me see any others you may write, and, if they are like this one, you need have no fear of finding a good market for them."

Tears of gratitude were in the girl's eyes as she listened. For the first time during the five long weeks of shame and self-abasement which had passed, a gleam of sunny happiness returned to her life. She could scarcely speak the thanks which welled to her lips and trembled for utterance. But Max Ormond stopped her with a kindly smile. She had risen, and he, too, now followed her example. He held out his hand, and she put hers timidly within it.

"There is one thing more," he said quietly. "Will you regard me as a friend who will always feel an interest in your welfare?"

"Can I regard you as anything else?" returned the girl, "when you have treated me so magnanimously and punished me, not with severity, or even with common justice, but with kindness?"

Max Ormond smiled.

"There are many diversities of regard," he said, "and friendship is surely not the highest."

The girl's eyes fell.

"It is not far from it," she said shyly.

Max Ormond regarded her attentively for a moment, while a strange light played about his handsome face.

"Well," he said at last, "we are friends then. I shall come to see you sometimes when your mother returns. Do you know, I am quite anxious to see this mother upon whom you lavish so rare an affection. But I won't detain you any longer to-day. Good-bye. I shall see you again before long."

And, with a warm pressure of the hand, he bowed her courteously out of the room.

A year later, a paragraph appeared in the marriage announcements of the *Times*, which ran as follows:

On December 1st, 19——, at St. Margaret's, Westminster, Jessie Beatrice Verrall, daughter of the late Rev. E. Bathurst Verrall, Rector of St. Cuthbert's, Hampstead, to Max Pentaur Ormond, Esq., son of Sir Gurney Ormond, M.P.

Walter J. Mowbray.

With penetrating eyes Max Ormond regarded the girl before him as though he would read her inmost soul.

FOR LOVE or MONEY.

The Story of a Case, and of the Circumstances which Altered It.

"Austen!"

"Dick!"

"Man!—is it your ghost?"

"No—I don't think so; though I'm a little in doubt as to *your* substantial reality, Dick!"

"Seriously, Austen!—where, in the name of Fortune, have you sprung from? It's eight years and more since you and I forogathered, and—well—there's something about you, Earle, that to me, is—is new and strange."

"I might say the same Dick, of you, but I'm afraid that it wouldn't seem kind."

"Oh!—you couldn't hurt my feelings, old chap! I'm past all that."

"Well, it's no use denying it, Dick!—things *are* changed for the better with me. If I were to tell you what I am worth to-day, you would hardly believe me. When you and I lived together in the Pimlico lodging, years ago, change for a sovereign was like an angel's visit. Now!—but come out of this crowd; we'll get to Holborn, and find a quiet place for a snack and a chat."

"But, Austen, old fellow! I—I'm not exactly fit to pair with you in a swell restaurant. Besides, I have to look after business."

Austen Earle looked his new-found friend in the eyes with kindly cunning.

"Dick!" he said, "you can't deceive me! Do you think I forget who it was that pawned his watch to raise the money to make up my passage? Do you think I forget that a certain Richard Mowbray sat up a whole night to finish a story; worried his editor the next morning till he got the money for it, and with sly treachery slipped every penny of that money into the pocket of his friend who was about to sail for El Dorado?"

"I only thought, Austen, that my companionship would perhaps compromise you."

"Anything more in that strain, Dick, and I shall begin to think that there is something in the theory of doubles, after all; and, that it is not you but your counterfeit, whom I have run up against to-day."

The two men, eight years before, were chums, in the best sense of the word. Friends at college, they had continued their friendship in close companionship till ill-fortune in the case of Austen Earle, made it necessary that he should leave England, and begin life again in a new country.

A clerk to a member of the Stock Exchange, he was one day accused—and, as it transpired two years later, falsely accused—of betraying Stock Exchange secrets to a firm of outside brokers. Clever as a financier, beyond the ordinary, his prompt and ignominious dismissal from his position, meant for him utter ruin. His friend, Richard Mowbray, a hard-working writer of fiction for the weeklies, it was who, by devoted effort, raised the money necessary to start the other on his new career.

Bitter belief in his guilt, shut both the hearts and the purses of the unfortunate young fellow's family and friends, so that but for Dick Mowbray's faithfulness and sympathy, he would have inevitably drifted into the ranks of the shipwrecked.

As for Dick himself; one of those gentle-souled Bohemians, who in the midst of a selfish world, are the true apostles of unselfishness; he lived his life through those eight years, not unhappily. Beyond one letter from New York, that announced his safe arrival, he heard no more from Austen Earle, till, as time went on, he came to believe that his old-time friend had dropped out of the race.

He still continued to live in the street off the Vauxhall Bridge Road, the only difference being, that on his friend's departure, he moved up into the attic.

Long connection with the big publishing firm for which he almost exclusively worked, made him familiar with nearly everybody at the office; and it was with a young girl, Phyllis Howell by name, typist and shorthand writer to the managing editor himself, that Dick Mowbray, some three years before Austen Earle's sudden reappearance on the scene, fell in love.

It so happened that Phyllis lived also in the Belgravian paradise, which, when Dick had discovered, he utilised to his own advantage. If it was a fine evening, and Phyllis walked home through the park, Dick found that he, too, had the pedestrian fit upon him, and the pair strolled Pimlico-wards in company. Was it wet or stormy, Dick's umbrella, as far as Charing Cross underground station, sheltered two instead of one, the same service being again rendered at Victoria, and gratefully acknowledged.

They were both fairly lonely young people, Dick's family letting him, as an irresponsible and somewhat disreputable Bohemian scribbler, severely alone, while Phyllis, as an unappreciated unit in an unsympathetic household, was shut up, within herself, so far as human companionship was concerned.

For some reason, which he could not exactly explain to himself, Dick Mowbray did not confide the fact of his engagement to Phyllis to Austen Earle.

Over a well-spread dinner-table at the Holborn Restaurant, Austen Earle told how that he had been six months in London, where he had set up in business as a large speculator in the purchase and sale of new companies.

He had been exceptionally fortunate in his ventures in America, having returned to England with a fortune running into six figures, which, he told Dick, he anticipated doubling in less than twelve months.

"And, now, old chap!" he said as they sat in the smoking room, "this eternal grind of yours must cease! No more burning of the midnight oil! No more days of failure and disappointment! What I have, is yours to share!—for you shared with me when it meant sacrifice and even worse."

"It is very good of you, my dear fellow!" said Dick, "and I know you mean it out of the generosity of your heart, but——"

"I will not hear a 'but'!"

"I was but going to say, that, though I haven't a pound too much, I have no claim upon your purse such as you would have me believe I have."

"Well, think it over. Perhaps you will find that there is something my money can do which will add to your comfort and happiness. Think it over, Dick, come and see me to-morrow in Old Broad Street, Palmerston Buildings. I must leave you now, for in an hour I am to sign a contract, which will give me the purchase option of the biggest commerical undertaking in the three Kingdoms."

Dick Mowbray stood a moment, looking after the hansom that bore eastwards the busy man of money, and then turned his steps in the direction of the office, where a five pound note awaited him for work done.

* * * * * * *

"Am I late, Dick?" said a voice in his ear, as he stood waiting in the entry of the big building.

It was ten minutes past six and he was fidgeting in so unmistakable a manner that Phyllis could not help noticing it.

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"Just a little bit, darling! But which is it to be, walk or train?"

"Whichever you like, Dick."

"Then we'll walk, for it will give me time to tell you of a most extraordinary experience of mine to-day.'"

"Anything good, dear, ?" she said, smiling up at him, for she had such unbounded faith in her lover's genius and ultimate success as a novelist of coming world-wide reputation, that she felt she would never be surprised at anything in the way of good fortune which might befall him.

"Well, in a way, yes; though the good really concerns someone else—an old friend of mine—you've heard me speak of him—Earle—Austen Earle?"

"Oh, yes, I know—he went abroad seven or eight years ago, didn't he?"

"Yes—and now he's come back with an enormous fortune, which he is using as a means to make, as he has just told me, the biggest pile of any one man in the City of London to-day."

"Oh, Dick!—why it's like a fairy-tale, isn't it?"

"But that isn't all, dear! Austen Earle, for old time's sake, and because he has an idea that he owes me a good turn, as he calls it, wants to share some of his money with me."

"Dick!—what a splendid fellow he must be!"

"Yes—he is a splendid fellow, but——"

"What did you say to him, Dick? Tell me, Dick!—tell me!"

"Well, I said scarcely anything; I was so full of that story I am doing this week—the one, you know, I told you of, that I am afraid my old friend's generous offer didn't quite appeal to me, in the way he perhaps looked for it to do."

"Dick," said Phyllis, after a moment's pause. "Are you going to slave, as you do now, all the rest of your life?"

"Hullo, Phyllis!" he answered her gaily. "What has come over you—I hope you are not getting mercenary! I shall always have to work hard, I expect; but for your sake, dear, I look forward to being more prosperous—some day."

"It does seem such a long time in coming—prosperity—doesn't it, Dick? Why you and I shall be too old to enjoy it when it comes, if it doesn't come soon. Fancy this Mr. Earle having all this money; and you obliged to write night and day almost, for so very, very little."

"Would it please you, dear then, if I let my friend throw me a charity dole?"

There was just a suspicion of irony in the question itself, and in the tone in which it was spoken.

"You should not put it in that way, Dick! Mr. Earle, I expect, has no such thought with regard to his generous intentions."

"I suppose not—or rather, perhaps not. But I am to see him about this time to-morrow, and will bring him to see you, if you will let me. I do not wish Earle to know that we are engaged."

"Why, Dick?"

"Oh, I don't know—it's a fad of mine, I suppose. I am jealous of almost every man, even of my old friend."

By this time they had arrived at Phyllis' door, where Dick left her, again promising to introduce Austen Earle to her at six o'clock on the following evening.

* * * * * *

Phyllis awaited with impatience her introduction to the man of money.

It must not be imagined that she was inclined to waver over so little in her allegiance to Dick. She loved him too well and truly for that.

When she saw Austen Earle, a tall, dark, keen-eyed man of the same age as Dick, she was not unnaturally anxious to please.

The man of money thought he had never seen so dainty a specimen of fair womanhood before, and mentally made notes concerning her.

The three strolled through the park to the Howell's door, where, before Dick and his friend left her, Phyllis extended to the latter an invitation to accompany Dick on his next visit to her parents' house.

Phyllis' dreams that night were golden in every way, and it must be confessed that all through the next day strange thoughts arose in her mind, concerning the power of money. Austen Earle figured more in her imaginings than poor Dick, who, bringing her that evening an armful of chrysanthemums, noticed something wanting in her manner towards him.

The meaning of it all came upon him with full force when he heard that, without waiting for his company, Austen Earle had called one evening in Gillingham Street, and had created a very favourable impression upon the family generally.

Then, one day, the bolt fell.

For several days now, Dick had kept away from the six o'clock tryst. He was ill-at-ease, irritable, and afraid to trust himself with Phyllis.

He had called in the usual way one morning, on business, when the porter handed him a note addressed to him in Phyllis' handwriting.

It was a pitiful little letter.

"Dick," she wrote, "I am very unhappy—I want to see you, oh! so much. I have something to tell you, too, which you must hear. If I do not see you at six to-night, I shall break my heart. You have been very cruel, Dick.—

"PHYLLIS."

As he left the building a hansom drove up, from it descending Austen Earle.

"The very man I wanted to see!" he said, and then, when they had passed up the street a little way, turned short round upon Dick. "You and I, between us, have managed to do the worst day's work we have ever done. But the fault was more yours than mine. Why didn't you trust me, Dick? Why didn't you tell me that that dear little girl was going to be your wife? I'll tell you why I ask you. Last evening I went to her father and told him that I loved his daughter, when he at once replied that you had her promise; had had it for three years and more. Was it fair to me—to her—to yourself even, to keep me in the dark? I thought something was wrong when you did not turn up lately."

Dick didn't know what to say. He saw that his friend was hurt more sorely than he cared to confess, and he felt, almost for the first time in his life, ashamed of himself.

"That's about all I wanted to say, Dick. I'm going to Paris to-night, and afterwards I don't know what I shall do. You shall hear from me, and if you'll take a fool's advice, you'll comfort that poor little woman before you're many hours older, for, unless I'm very much mistaken, she is fairly wrung over this wretched business. Good-bye, old chap! I'll write you from Paris!"

* * * * * *

It is satisfactory to know that between Phyllis and Dick there is no question now as to the respective merits of love and money.

With Phyllis there never had been any real hankering after the "golden calf." With her, it was but a young girl's natural bewilderment in the presence of a man who, like a magician, could, if he would, bring the world to his feet. Once the novelty of this feeling worn off, and there remained, as pure and as true as ever, the love, which Dick knows now, could never have given place to a mere desire for money, and all that money could buy.

A few days before the wedding, Dick received a letter from Austen Earle, dated from New York, where, he said, he had after all, decided to work and live.

Accompanying the letter, was a small box, containing some remarkably fine diamonds which the writer requested Dick to have made up into any form of ornament Phyllis liked, charging the setting of the same to his, Austen Earle's account.

"I wish," he said in conclusion, "both you and your wife the happiness that comes from perfect mutual love; just asking from you an occasional kind thought for him who would like always to be looked upon by you as your friend—"AUSTEN EARLE."

Ralph Enderby..

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A KERRY LOVE IDYLL.

The Old, Old Story Ending as it Should.

She was a flaxen-haired, Irish maid of eighteen. He, an Englishman of eight-and-twenty.

Opposite in nature, tastes and education, the two nevertheless fraternised, as is so often the case with people whose views but rarely coincide.

Hard, sceptical, and a cynic on matters both human and divine, Arthur Haddon had arrived at Athlee to go over the ground which he had chosen for the scene of his next novel.

In the village of Athlee none knew what had induced him to come to that little out-of-the-way hamlet on the banks of the Feale. No one knew whence he came, his natural taciturnity and reserve repelling all pertinent questions of this description. Thus he remained, till one day in the course of a ramble in search of information his eyes lighted on Nora O'Roole.

From a smile and a nod a sort of friendship sprung up, a friendship which had deepened into a far deeper feeling ere a month had passed over their heads.

Days and weeks flew by unheeded. Then a letter arrived from his publishers who inquired when they might expect the first instalment of his new novel. The trade, they stated, had been given to understand that the book would be issued to the public early in October. They concluded their epistle, by stating, that it was the beginning of July and that so far not a page of manuscript had come to hand.

"I wonder if they think I am not aware of that most obvious fact," he mused aloud, as crushing the missive in his hand, he smiled grimly. "The beggars are right, however. There's no help for it. I must return to London and scribble for dear life and break the chain which binds me to this place."

He informed Nora of his resolution that evening, as the two were floating down the river in a boat, which he had hired for the summer.

"Going?" she echoed softly, turning her head to gaze apparently at the fields, bathed in the warm glow of a summer sunset.

"Going? When do you leave Athlee, Arthur?"

"To-morrow," replied Haddon, and paused abruptly, expecting a reply.

He was doomed to disappointment. His only answer being the splash of his oars as they clove the placid waters of the stream and a soft, silvery ripple as the stem of the boat cut its way through the tranquil surface of the river.

"Nora."

"Yes, Arthur."

"I don't suppose that it will make much difference to you whether I stay or go, will it?" His voice was pathetically inquiring.

"I would rather that you stayed."

"Why?"

He had rested the oars across his knees and leant forward, a hungry, yearning look in his eyes as he bent them on the girl reclining amid a bevy of cushions at the stern of the boat.

"I shall miss our rambles. Are you tired of Athlee, that you have taken so sudden a resolution to leave it? But sure, you must be wanting to get back to London," she said, then added slowly, "and a good-looking fellow like yourself is sure to have someone, waiting for him to come back."

There was the faintest trace of bitterness in the concluding words of her sentence.

"No," he said slowly. "I am not tired of Athlee, for I love the place. Neither have I a girl waiting for me to return to London. I must, however, leave here. I have stayed too long as it is, and my publishers——"

"Your publishers?" she echoed, inquiringly, steering clear of a floating snag. "What are they?"

"They are beings who print your books and sell them. You see, I am an author, Nora, so I am pretty dependent on them. It seems strange to me to hear you say that someone is waiting for me in England," he said wistfully. "If you only knew how I lived, you would realise how bitter is the irony of your words. My dear Nora, there is no one in England who cares for me enough to do that."

"Are you sure of that, Arthur?"

"Am I sure?" he laughed bitterly. "I know it only too well. Has a taciturn, sceptical man, friends? But rarely, Nora! My cynicism and suspicion have estranged me from my family. Have robbed me of my friends and deprived me of love. For years I have lived for myself alone, and see what I am now. True, I am rich and well known. But what is the use of either wealth or fame to a man if he be friendless and unbeloved! Nora, were I to die to-morrow, there is not a soul who would care unless it were my publishers. I am a source of revenue to them," he added sardonically.

"Do you not view life from too dismal a standpoint?" she queried lightly, steering the boat to the bank and jumping on to it.

"Perhaps," he replied sadly, grasping the hand which she extended to him and stepping out of the boat. "It has been owing to that failing that I am what I am. Now there is nothing left for me but to remain the cynic to the end of the chapter."

"I shouldn't if I were you," she said sagely. "Why not turn over the proverbial new leaf and view things from their rosiest side? Faith, I am thinking that it would be more pleasant."

"It is easy for you to speak thus," he said, a shade of bitterness in his voice. "What shadow has ever crossed your sunlit path? Nora, this has been the happiest time of my life. For three months I have lived in a sort of Eden. I have—that is—oh, I almost wish I had never come here, Nora."

"I don't. Why?"

"Because of the change which is about to take place in my life. Before I came to Athlee, Nora, I was quite content with my flat, my books, and my pipe. No one cared to visit me, and I, for my part, wanted none to look me up. Now, however, all this is changed. How can I return to them and be content when the memory of our happy days spent on the Feale and the vision of Athlee village come between myself and my work. I fear the recollection, Nora, that is why I wish that I had never come."

A sigh which was half strangled at birth escaped his lips.

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"You surely do not mean to say that you prefer Athlee to London!" she said, her voice trembling oddly. "How strange!"

"It is, however, true," Haddon replied, bending down to tie the boat's painter to a neighbouring post. "Athlee to me is the loveliest spot in Christendom."

"Why?"

"Because, Nora, it contains the one thing I have ever loved in all this wide world of ours!" he replied, with a tensity which thrilled his hearer.

"A girl, of course," she remarked tentatively.

"As you say—a girl," he answered, unmindful of the pallor which was slowly creeping over Nora's face.

"Why don't you propose to her then?" she asked gently. "She might love——"

"Ah, might," he interrupted, wistfully. "That is where the shoe pinches. She might not care to marry me, and if this were the case, her refusal would extinguish for ever the one bright spark which has illumined my dreary life. No, Nora, I know that you will think that I am mad, but I prefer to live on in uncertainty. To think what might have been had——"

"It isn't fair to the girl if she loves you," said Nora, tremblingly. "You have no right to ruin her life, even if you have to do so to yours."

"But how do I know that such would be the case? How—"

"Faith, you can't know without finding out. Why, her heart might be—be—breaking—at this—mo——" Nora's voice grew huskier till it finally died away in a whisper, as she raised her eyes bright with tears to his.

A strange light illumined them, a very wealth of love and pleading looking up at him from their violet depths.

"Nora, Nora, do you realise what you are saying?" he cried hoarsely, as pressing her slim form to his he rained kisses on her resistless lips. "You are telling me that you love—oh, darling, is it true? I can't leave Ireland without its loveliest daughter as my wife! I love you, darling! Love you as no man has ever loved woman before. You told me to ask the girl I loved to be my wife, I am waiting for her answer—I am waiting for yours, Nora, love."

And as he pressed her slim form to him and felt her trembling with happy sobs, he knew his answer before she spoke it.

Tristam K. Monck.

MRS. CALLER: "What is the name of your new servant?" Mrs. Wifey: "We call her Bliss." Mrs. Caller: "Why?" Mrs. Wifey: "Because ignorance is bliss."

DEMONSTRATOR (in clinics): "You will notice that the subject's right leg is longer than his left, which causes him to limp. Now, what would you do in such a case?" Bright Student: "I'd limp, too."

"YES," said the chairman sadly, "our temperance meeting last night would have been more successful if the lecturer hadn't been so absent-minded." "What did he do?" "He tried to blow the foam from a glass of water."

"YER lordship, I didn't steal this man's cornet; indeed I didn't," pleaded the prisoner. "I bought if from him. You know me better than that. I live in the same street as you." "Oh, you do, eh?" said the judge. "Well, five years. Call the next."

TELESCOPE PROPRIETOR: "Step up, ladies and gents, and view the planet Mars. One penny, mum." Old Lady: "Oh, law! Hain't it round and smooth?" Telescope Proprietor: "Will the bald-headed gent please step away from the front of the instrument."

GENTLEMAN: "You ask me for a small gift, and do not even take off your hat from your head. Is that the way to act?" Beggar: "Excuse me, most honourable sir, I dare not, for yonder stands a policeman. If he should see me take off my hat it will occur to him at once that I am a beggar, and he will arrest me. At present, as we are now, he merely supposes we are old acquaintances having a friendly chat!"

YOUR EDITOR CHATS.

A GOOD deal of correspondence has reached me as the result of the publication of the instalment of "HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA," containing reference to the efforts of Honoria to become married to El Hamed, the Egyptian. Many readers look upon this incident as ridiculous, and say that no lady of title such as Lady Honoria would think of falling in love with an Egyptian, no matter how high his position may be. In making such statements, of course these readers have only convinced me of how little the average person knows about life in High Society, and it is with a view to spreading knowledge on the subject that I am publishing such series of articles as "THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA" and "HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA."

That such an affair as that between Honoria and El Hamid is not only possible but probable, is pretty obvious when one reads the following news item which appeared in a recent number of the *Daily Express*:

EMIR'S ENGLISH WIFE.

"RIVAL IN THE HAREM CAUSES HER IMPRISONMENT.

"Constantinople.

"The English and American residents at Constantinople were much surprised in May when it was announced that Miss Isabel Dunn, an English lady, had married an Arab, who was a descendant of the prophet Mohammed and who aspires to be the next Emir of Mecca. The marriage has turned out to be a most unhappy one, as everybody expected.

"Miss Dunn was introduced into the house of the Arab as a governess for his two sons, and after some months in that position she became a convert to Mohammedanism, and was secretly married to her employer.

"For some time the marriage was kept secret from the other wives, but it was soon discovered, and the other ladies of the harem did everything they possibly could to annoy the new bride. The favourite wife discovered that, according to Mohammedan law, it was impossible for anyone to become the Emir of Mecca who married anyone who had ever been a Christian. She communicated this news to her friends, and in consequence the Emir fled into the country, and has not been heard of since.

"Meanwhile she caused Miss Dunn to be imprisoned in a small kiosk in a little garden near Scutari. Here she remains for the present time, a prisoner and friendless. She is visited once a day by a servant, who brings her food and attends to her other wants, but otherwise she is cut off from all communication with the rest of the world. As she is now a Turkish subject, and also a Mohammedan, she cannot claim any protection from England."

This reads more like fiction than fact, does it not? Yet every word of it is true. Those who are sceptical as to the facts contained in the "BELINDA" series will perhaps now feel convinced that what we say is perfectly correct, viz., that all the statements made are exactly as they happened, the only alteration being that of the names of the chief characters concerned.

A very simple way of obtaining £10 is to turn to page 13. There you will find an announcement to the effect that this sum will be given to the person who sends in what the Editor considers to be the best reason for having it. I don't know of any simpler way of distributing money. If you cannot think of a reason why you should receive £10, then, of course, you don't deserve it. If there is a reason why you should receive £10, then send it along to the COMPETITION Editor, and if he considers it the best of those received you will be the richer by a £10 Note.

Your Editor.

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Domestic Taste.

FIRST CLUBMAN: "Is Jackson a man of domestic tastes?" Second Clubman: "Very; I understand he flirts with his servants."

What She Had in the Bank.

HE: "Before proposing, Miss Lulu, I wish to know if you have anything in the bank?" She: "Yes, Mr. Poorman, I have a lover there. He is the cashier, and we are to be married next week."

Mary Didn't Know.

MISTRESS: "How is it, Mary, that whenever I enter the kitchen I always find a man there?" Mary: "I don't know, ma'am, indeed, unless it be them there soft shoes ye wears, that don't make no noise!"

An Unfair Advantage.

JESS: "I thought that you hated Jack, and yet you have accepted him." Bess: "I did hate him; but he proposed under an umbrella, and said if I refused he would let the rain drip on my new hat."

Father's Condition.

BANKS: "What did her father say when you told him that you wanted to marry his daughter?" Rivers: "Well, he didn't absolutely refuse, but he imposed a very serious condition." Banks: "What was it?" Rivers: "He said he would see me hanged first."

There Was no Mirror Handy.

MRS. MYLES: "I told Mrs. Styles I had heaped coals of fire on her head, and she looked worried." Mrs. Fyles: "What made her look worried, do you suppose?" Mrs. Myles: "She didn't know whether they were on straight or not."

The Very Reason.

MRS. O'BRIEN: "Good-mornin'; Mrs. M'Cabe. An' phwat makes yez look so sad?" Mrs. M'Cabe: "Shure, Dennis was sint to gaol for six months." Mrs. O'Brien: "Well, shure, don't worry; six months will soon pass." Mrs. M'Cabe: "Shure, that's phwat worries me."

Hands Off!

ONE afternoon, when a perfect gale of wind was raging, a gentleman, in feeble health, was struggling to reach his home, aided by his wife. Just as they reached the corner of a street a huge tin chimney-pot was torn from the roof of a house by the power of the wind, and dashed to the ground just in front of the feeble gentleman and his wife. "Good gracious!" cried the gentleman, "that was a narrow escape for us." "If it had struck us it would have killed us," she replied. The two stopped for a moment to examine the chimney-pot, more dangerous in a high wind than a bomb-shell; but just as they were scrutinising it a window near by was opened, a female head was thurst out, and in a shrill tone she shouted: "You needn't think you're going to carry that 'ere offcause it b'longs to my house!"

How it Happened.

GREENE: "How did Jones come to marry that red-haired girl?" White: "Poor Jones didn't notice it; he is colour blind."

Just as Well to Know.

PAPA: "So you asked my daughter to marry you. Can you support a family?" Suitor: "How many of you are there?"

Easily Accounted For.

"Do I squint, Charlie?" asked the rich girl. "A little, Maudie," he said tenderly; "but who wouldn't with your eyes? If mine were as beautiful as yours, I'd be trying to look into them myself."

Why Women Dislike Prominent Bachelors.

WINKERS: "Why is it that women always dislike a prominent man who is an old bachelor?" Blinkers: "Because they can't say he would never have amounted to anything if it had not been for his wife."

There Are More Ways.

TOMMY: "Yes, cats can see in the dark, and so can Ethel, 'cause when Mr. Wright walked into the parlour, when she was sittin' all alone in the dark, I heard her say to him: 'Why, Arthur, you didn't get shaved to-day!'"

Not What He Wanted to Know.

STERN PARENT: "Quite so, sir, quite so! You tell me that you have proposed to my daughter, but—er—you say nothing about your position." Nervous Suitor: "My position, sir? Oh—er—the—the—usual one, I believe—on my knees, you know."

A Necessary Alteration.

HUSBAND (impatiently): "What is the reason my wife doesn't come down? I thought she was almost ready to go to the ball an hour ago." Maid: "She will be ready in a minute, sir. She has been changing her colour to match her new hair."

Perfectly Safe.

PRETTY DAUGHTER: "Ma, may I go boating?" Fond Mother: "Indeed you shan't. The idea! Who invited you?" Daughter: "Mr. Bliffers." Fond Mother: "Oh, yes, you may go with Mr. Bliffers. He has a cork leg, and if the boat upsets just you hang on to that."

Its Own Punishment.

MR. PARAKAY: "These two seats you gave me are in different rows, one behind the other." Ticket-seller: "One seat is for a lady, is it not?" Mr. Parakay: "Yes." Ticket seller: "Well, that is all right, then. You are expected to sit behind the lady, and if you bring one with a big hat it's your own fault. That's the way we sell 'em now."

Now Reginald Doesn't Call.

SHE: "Yes, Reginald, I confess you have awakened in my heart tender throbbings of a first and only love." He: "Dovey! Darling onliest only!" Her young brother (peeping from behind the curtain): "Hullo! Caught yer! Look here, if yer don't give me a tanner I'll split." She: "Tommy, you little beast, go away, and if you hold your tongue I'll give you a sixpence—to-morrow." Relentless Fiend: "No fear, no more tick! You promised me a bob if I didn't tell ma about Sammy Spooner kissing you, and you never brassed up yet."

A Young Philosopher.

MRS. MURRAY was reading a story to her son Justin, aged five years. Mrs. Murray: "Now, Justin, if your father were to die, would you work to help mamma?" Justin: "Why, mamma, what for? Haven't we got a nice house to live in?" Mrs. Murray: "Yes, Justin, but we can't eat the house, you know." Justin: "Well, mamma, haven't we got a whole lot of good things in the pantry?" Mrs. Murray: "Certainly, pet, but we would soon eat them up, and then what would we do?" Justin: "Well, mamma, isn't there enough to last until you could get another husband?"

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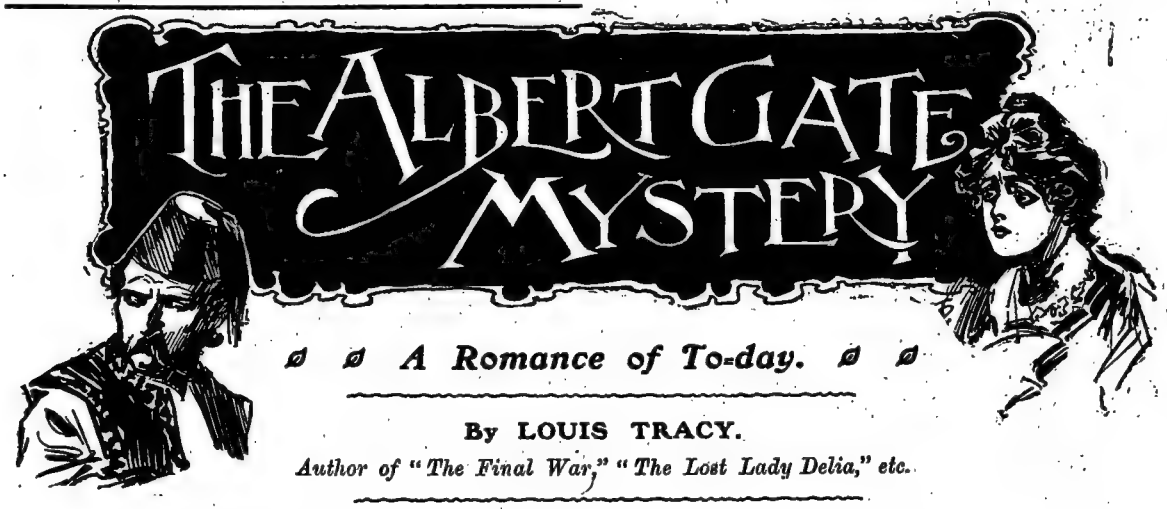
OUR NEW SERIAL STORY.



A Romance of To-day.

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

Mr. Brett's Quest.

A NUMBER of priceless diamonds having been most mysteriously stolen from an Albert Gate Mansion, and four of the custodians of the jewels murdered, Mr. Brett, barrister and detective, in conjunction with the police, is called upon to help clear up the mystery.

The diamonds, it appears, were sent over by the Sultan of Turkey in charge of a number of Turkish officials, and, being of political importance, the mission was placed by the British Government in the care of Mr. Jack Talbot, of the Foreign Office. Upon the night of the robbery and murder, Mr. Talbot disappears.

The Earl of Fairholme, being engaged to be married to Talbot's sister, intrusts Brett with the finding of Talbot.

Brett's first clue is the statement of Mr. Winter, a Scotland Yard detective, that Mr. Talbot and a lady have been seen in Paris, Talbot having signed his name in a hotel register. Brett goes to Paris to see if the signature is genuine.

On board the boat going across he finds a Scotland Yard man, probably sent to arrest Talbot, as being a party to the crime.

CLINGING to the hand-rails and executing some crude but effective balancing feats, he reached the dining saloon, which was woefully denuded of occupants, for the English Channel that night had sternly set its face against the indiscriminate use of cold ham.

Near the bar, however, solemnly digesting a liqueur, stood a man to whom the choppy sea evidently gave no concern. He had the square shoulders, neat-fitting clothes, and closely clipped appearance at the back of the neck which mark the British officer; but he also stood square on his feet, and swayed with unconscious ease whether the vessel pitched, or rolled or executed the combined movement.

"Now, I wonder," said Brett, "if that is Captain Gaultier. He must be. Gaultier, from his name, should be a Jersey man, hence his facility in foreign languages and his employment as a Foreign Office messenger. It's worth trying. I will make the experiment."

He reached the bar and ordered a whisky and soda. Turning affably to the stranger, he remarked:

"Nasty night, isn't it? I hope we shan't be much behind time."

The stranger glanced at him with sharp and inquisitive eyes, but the glance evidently reassured him, for he replied, quite pleasantly:

"Oh, no. A matter of a few minutes perhaps. Then they usually manage to make up any delay after we leave Calais."

"That's good," said Brett, "because I want to be in Paris at the earliest possible moment."

The other man smiled.

"We are due there at 5.38," he said. "Rather an early hour for business, isn't it?"

"Well, yes," assented the barrister, "under ordinary circumstances, but as my only business in Paris is to examine a hotel register and then get something to eat before I return, I do not wish to waste time unnecessarily on the road."

The other man nodded affably, but gave no sign of further interest.

"So," communed Brett, "if it be Gaultier he has not heard the latest developments. I must try a frontal attack."

"Does your name happen to be Gaultier?" he went on.

The stranger arrested his liqueur glass in the final tilt.

"It does," he said, "but I do not think I have the pleasure of knowing you."

"No," said Brett, "you haven't."

"Well?" said the other man.

"The fact is," said Brett, "that I heard you had been in London. I guessed from your appearance that you might be a King's messenger, and it was just possible that the Captain Gaultier in whom I was interested might start back to the Continent to-night, so I just put two and two together, don't you see, with the result that it made four, a thing that doesn't always happen in deduction if not in mathematics."

Now, Foreign Office messengers are not chosen for their simplicity or general want of intelligence. Captain Gaultier eyed his questioner with some degree of stern suspicion as he said from behind his cigar:

"May I ask who you are?"

"Certainly," said Brett, producing his card.

After a quick glance at the pasteboard, Gaultier continued:

"I suppose, Mr. Brett, you have some motive in addressing me? What is it?"

"I am interested in the fate of a man named Talbot," was the straightforward reply, "and as you told the Under-Secretary that you had seen Talbot crossing to Paris in company with a lady last Tuesday, I hoped that perhaps you would not mind discussing the matter with me."

Captain Gaultier was evidently puzzled. Private conversations with Under-Secretaries of State are not, as a rule, public property, and his momentary intention to decline further conversation with this good-looking and fascinating stranger was checked by the remembrance of that fact.

"Really, Mr. Brett," he said, "although I do not question

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the accuracy of your statement, you will readily understand that I can hardly discuss the matter with you under the circumstances."

"Naturally. You would not be holding a responsible position in His Majesty's service if you were at all likely to do any such thing. But I propose, in the first instance, to reassure you as to my *bona-fides*, and I may point out, in the second place, that as I have met you by a fortunate chance, you can hardly deem it a breach of confidence to discuss with me the mere accidental appearance on a cross-Channel steamer of a man known not only to both of us but to Society at large."

Gaultier clearly hesitated, but he did not refuse to accept the Under-Secretary's letter, which Brett handed to him, with the words:

"You know the handwriting, no doubt."

"That speaks for itself." The King's messenger smiled when he returned the note. "It is an odd coincidence," he added. "And still more curious that you should spot me so readily. However, Mr. Brett, we have now cleared the air. What can I do for you?"

"Simply this," said the barrister, "do you mind telling me how you came to recognise Mr. Talbot?"

"Well, for one thing," was the thoughtful reply, "I knew his overcoat. I often met Mr. Talbot in the Foreign Office, and one day he drove me to his club wearing a very handsome coat lined with astrachan. It struck me as a peculiarly comfortable and well-fitting one, and although there are plenty of men about town who may possess astrachan coats, it is a reasonable assumption that this was the identical garment when it happened to be worn by the man himself."

"Then you are quite certain it was Talbot?" went on the barrister.

"Quite certain."

"Would you swear it was he, even though his life depended upon your accuracy?"

"Well, no, perhaps not that, but I would certainly swear that I believed it was Mr. Talbot."

"Ah, that is a material difference. The only way in which you could be positively certain was to enter into conversation with him, was it not?"

"Yes, that is so."

"I do not want you to think, Captain Gaultier, that I am cross-examining you. Let me tell you at once that I believe the man you saw was masquerading in Talbot's clothes, and made up to represent him. Was there anything about his appearance that might lend credence to such a view?"

The other reflected a little while before answering.

"There was only one thing," he said, "and that was the fact that he did not seem to notice me. Now, he is a sharp sort of chap, and as it was broad daylight and a fine day he must have seen me, as he knows me well. Again, from all that I have heard of him, I do not think that he would either pass an acquaintance without speaking to him, or take trips on the Continent with ladies of the music-hall persuasion."

"You have supplied two very powerful reasons why the individual you saw should not be Jack Talbot. Yet, as you say, it was broad daylight, and you had a good look at him."

"No, no," interrupted the other. "I had a good look at his coat—and the lady. Whoever the man was he appeared to be wrapped up in both of them, and he certainly did not court observation. I naturally thought that the feminine attachment accounted for this, and, for the same reason, I did not even seek to scrutinise him too closely. To put the thing in a nutshell, I saw a man whom I believed to be Jack Talbot—and who certainly resembled him in face and figure—attired in Talbot's clothes, and wearing a coat which I had noted so particularly as to be able to describe it to my tailor when ordering a similar one. Add to that the appearance of an attractive lady, young and unknown, and you have my soul laid bare to you in the matter."

GIFT OF £50
From One Reader to the Rest.
See page 13.

"Thank you," said Brett, "I am much obliged."

He would have quitted the saloon, but Captain Gaultier laughed, as he said:

"Hold on a bit: it is my turn now. Suppose I try to pump you."

The Fellow-Passenger.

A giant wave took hold of the vessel and shook her violently, and Brett, though an average amateur sailor, felt that the saloon was no place for him.

"Between you and the ship, Captain Gaultier," he said, "the success of the operation would be certain. I have secured a quiet corner of the deck, so if you wish for a further talk we must adjourn there."

The transit was effected without incident, much to Brett's relief. After a minute or two he felt that a cigar was possible. He turned to his companion with a quiet observation:

"The vessel has failed. You can start now."

"Well," said Gaultier, "tell me what is the mystery attaching to Talbot's movements. I only heard the vaguest of rumours in the Department, but something very terrible appears to have happened, and, indeed, I heartily wished I had kept my mouth shut concerning my supposed meeting with him last Tuesday, as the affair was no business of mine. Moreover, you have now somewhat shaken my belief in his identity, although I can hardly tell you why that should be so." Brett glanced round to make sure that no one would overhear him, but the fierce wind that whistled round the charthouse and bridge, the seas that smote the ship's quarter with a thunderous noise, the all pervading sense of riotous fury in the elements, rendered the precaution almost unnecessary. Despite the weather, however, there was no one near enough to act the part of eavesdropper, and Brett, exercising his power of rapid decision which frequently impressed observers as a gift of divination, determined that to let such a man as the King's Messenger into the secret could not possibly be harmful to the interests of his client, whilst his aid might be very beneficial.

In the fewest possible words, therefore, he poured the tale into the other's wondering ear.

When he had finished, Gaultier remained silent a few minutes.

Already the clear radiance of the magnificent light at Calais was sending intermittent flashes of brightness over the deck, and the long shoulder of Cape Gris Nez was thrusting the force of the gale back into mid-channel.

"I think," said Gaultier, speaking slowly and thoughtfully, "that your view is the right one, Mr. Brett. There is much more in this business than meets the eye, and any man who believes that Jack Talbot would mix himself up in it must be a most determined ass. Of course such people do exist, but they shouldn't be in the police force. You are going on to Paris, you said?"

"Yes."

"Then we might travel together. All that you have said is quite new to me. Curiously enough I have just returned from Constantinople and I may be able to help you."

Brett silently thanked his stars for the gratuitous circumstance that threw him into the company of Captain Gaultier. He recognised that the King's Messenger, with the precaution that might be expected from one whose daily life depended entirely upon the exercise of that faculty, desired to mentally review the strange facts made known to him before he committed himself further. With ready tact the barrister changed the conversation to matters of the moment until they reached the pier at Calais, when both men, not encumbered with much luggage, were amongst the first flight of passengers to reach the station buffet.

On their way they captured a railway official and told him to reserve a *coupé lit* compartment. In the midst of their

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hasty meal the Frenchman arrived, voluble, apologetic. The train was crowded. Never had there been such a rush to the South. By the exercise of most profound care he had secured them two seats in a compartment, but the third had already taken itself. He was sorry for it, but he had done his best.

When they entered their carriage they found the third occupant in possession. He was French, aggressively so. Phil May might have used him for a model. The poor man had been wretchedly ill from the moment he left Dover until the vessel was tied to her berth in the harbour at Calais. He paid not the least attention to the newcomers, being apparently absorbed in contemplation of his own misery. The two Englishmen, though experienced travellers, were sufficiently insular to resent the presence of the stranger, whom Brett resolved to put to the language test forthwith.

"It is very cold in here," he said, "Shall I turn on the hot air?"

The Frenchman seemed to understand that he had been spoken to. He looked up with a shivering smile and explained that he had only booked one seat. The remainder of the compartment was at their disposal. He was evidently guiltless of acquaintance with the English tongue, but Brett did not like his appearance.

Though well-dressed and well-spoken he was a nondescript individual, and the flash of his dark eyes was not reassuring. Yet the man was so ill that Brett forthwith dismissed him from his thoughts, though he took care to occupy the centre seat himself, thus placing Captain Gaultier on the other side of the carriage. After a visit from the ticket examiner, the Frenchman disposed himself for a nap and the train soon started.

Captain Gaultier, by this time, had made up his mind as to the information he felt he could give his new acquaintance.

"It is very odd," he said, "that those diamonds should disappear just at the moment when there is every sign unrest in Turkey. You know, of course, the manner of th last Sultan's death?"

Brett nodded.

"And you have heard, no doubt, something of the pr cautions taken by the present Sultan to safeguard his life?"

"Yes," said Brett.

"Well, these have been redoubled of late, and the ma never goes out that he is not in the most abject state of fea He is a pitiful sight, I assure you. I saw him less than fortnight ago, driving to the Mosque on Friday, and hi coachman evidently had orders to go at a gallop through th streets, whilst not only was the entire road protected b soldiers, but every house had been previously examined b police agents. There is something in the wind of more tha usual importance in the neighbourhood of Yildiz Kiosk jus now, I am certain. I suppose you did not chance to see an mention of the fact that Hussein ul Mulk, the Sultan's nephew has recently fled from Turkey, and is now under the pro tection of the French Government?"

"Yes, I noticed that."

"You don't seem to miss much," was Gaultier's sharp remark, pausing in his narrative to light a cigar.

"One of my few virtues is that I read the newspapers," said Brett.

The train was slowing down as it neared the town statio in Calais, and Gaultier's voice could be momentarily heard above its diminishing rattle.

"Well," he said, "I happen to know Hussein ul Mulk and if we could find out where he lives in Paris I would intro duce you to him."

Brett looked at the slumbering Frenchman out of the corne of his eye. The man appeared to be dozing peacefully enough but the alert barrister had an impression that his limbs were not sufficiently relaxed under the influence of slumber. Indeed

(*Continued on next page.*)

AFTER EFFECTS of Influenza!

An attack of Influenza leaves the human system too weak to stand the strains of ordinary every-day life. It disorganises the digestive organs, and as a natural result, it leaves the liver in an unhealthy condition.

The ordinary duty of the liver is to separate the bile from the blood. Bile is necessary to assist the digestion of food, and it also helps the bowels to act regularly. The liver is easily disorganised if anything whatever interferes with its action.

It is quite plain, then, that an attack of Influenza brings about a generally debilitated condition of the system, and a tonic is required which will tone up the organs of digestion and the liver to their normal condition.

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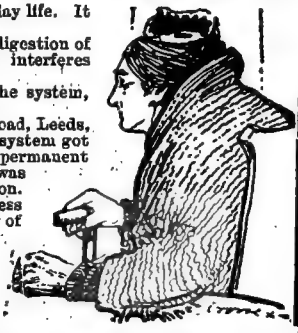

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he felt sure that the Frenchman was wide awake and endeavouring to catch the drift of their conversation.

"I will be most pleased to meet your friend, Captain Gaultier," he said, "and lest it should slip your memory I will give you a reminder."

He opened his card-case and wrote on the back of a card: "Grand Hotel. Breakfast 11.30. No more at present."

The quick-witted King's Messenger read and understood.

"It seems to me," he went on, "that my friend is the very man for your purpose, and though he is not in favour at Court just now he has plenty of friends in the various departments, and he could give you letters which would be certain to secure you some excellent orders. I suppose you are going to the East as the result of the rumoured intention of the Turkish Government to reconstitute the navy."

Brett made a haphazard guess at Gaultier's meaning.

"Yes," he said, "we ought to place a good many thousand tons with them."

Gaultier leant forward to strike a match and glanced at their companion. For some indescribable reason he shared Brett's views concerning this gentleman, and immediately started a conversation of general significance. They soon discovered that they had several mutual friends, and in this way they passed the dreary journey to Paris pleasantly enough.

At the Gare du Nord, their knowledge of French methods enabled them to get quickly clear of the Octroi, as neither of them had any baggage which rendered their presence necessary at the Custom-house. The Frenchman, who seemed to be thoroughly revived by the air of his beloved Paris, hurried out simultaneously with themselves. He had no difficulty in hearing Brett's directions to a cabman, but Gaultier had entered a vehicle at some distance.

Brett was the first away from the station. He fancied he saw his French travelling companion hastily whisper something to a lounger near the exit, so he suddenly pulled up his *voiture*, gave the driver a two-franc piece and told him to go to the Grand Hotel and there await his arrival. The cab had halted for the moment in the Rue de Lafayette, at the corner of the Place Valenciennes, and the cabman, recognising that his fare was an Englishman and consequently mad, drove off immediately in obedience to orders.

Though nearly six o'clock in the morning, it was quite dark, but as Brett walked rapidly back towards the station he had no difficulty in picking out Gaultier, who drove past him in an open vehicle. Some little distance behind came another, and herein the barrister thought he recognised the man to whom his French companion in the train had spoken. By this time many other cabs were dashing out of the station-yard, so Brett took the chance that he might be hopelessly wrong.

He hailed a third vehicle and told the driver to follow the other two, which were now some distance down the Rue de Lafayette. Not until the three cabs had crossed the Place de l'Opera and passed the Madeleine could Brett be certain that the occupant of the second was following his friend Gaultier. Then he chuckled to himself, for this was surely a rare stroke of luck.

Quickly reviewing the possibilities of the affair, he came to the conclusion that the Frenchman in the train really understood little, if any, English, but that he had caught the name of the fugitive from the Sultan's wrath and had forthwith betrayed an interest in their conversation which was, to say the least, remarkable. At the exit from the Gare du Nord the stranger had readily enough ascertained Brett's destination, but he clearly regarded it as important that Gaultier—the man who claimed Hussein ul Mulk as a friend—should be tracked, and had given the necessary instructions to the confederate who awaited his arrival

Special Story for Scottish Readers.
See page 14.

Although Gaultier had not said so, Brett guessed that his destination was the British Embassy in the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré. The route followed by the cabman led straight to that well-known locality. The Frenchman in the second cab evidently thought likewise, for, at the corner of the Rue Boissy he pulled up, and Brett was just in time to give his driver instructions to go ahead and thus avoid attracting undue notice to himself.

Gaultier turned into the Embassy, and Brett himself halted a little further on. Dismissing his driver with a liberal fare, he walked rapidly back, and was just in time to see the Frenchman enter into conversation with the night porter on duty. The latter personage, however, was clearly a trustworthy official, for he loudly told the other to be off and attend to his own affairs.

Then followed for Brett a most exciting and perplexing chase through many streets, and it was only by the exercise of his keenest powers of observation that he finally located his man at a definite number in the Rue Barbette, a tiny thoroughfare in the Temple district.

By this time dawn was rapidly advancing over Paris, and the streets were beginning to fill with early workers. He inquired from a passer-by the most likely locality in which he could find a cab, and the man civilly conducted him to the Rue de Rivoli. Thence he was not long in reaching the Grand Hotel, where he found the astonished driver of his first vehicle still safeguarding his bag and arguing fiercely with a porter that he had unquestionably obeyed the Englishman's instructions.

Tired though he was, Brett did not fail to scrutinise the list of arrivals at the hotel on the preceding Tuesday. He instantly found the entry he sought. The arrival of "Mr. and Mrs. John Talbot, London," was chronicled in the register with uncompromising boldness. Hastily comparing the writing in Talbot's letter with that in the visitors' book, Brett was at first staggered by their similarity but he quickly recognised the well-known signs which indicate that a man who himself writes a bold and confident hand has been copying a signature of another with the object of reproducing it freely and with reasonable accuracy. There are always perceptible differences in the varying pressure of the pen and the distribution of the ink.

Allowance had evidently not been made for the fact that Englishmen almost invariably write their names very badly in Continental hotel registers owing to their inability to use foreign pens. The man who had not only forged Mr. Talbot's name, but had also supplied him with a wife, laboured under no such disadvantage. Indeed, Talbot himself would probably not have written his own name so legibly.

"That is all right," said Brett wearily, traversing a corridor to gain his room. "Now I wonder if there is any connection between Hussein ul Mulk and the Rue Barbette."

The House in the Rue Barbette.

Brett was called at ten o'clock. After reinvigorating himself with a bath and a hearty breakfast, he was ready to meet Captain Gaultier, who arrived promptly at 11.30.

In the spacious foyer of the Grand Hotel it was impossible to say who might be looking at them.

"Come to my room," said Brett. "There we will be able to talk without interruption."

Once comfortably seated, Brett resumed the conversation where he had broken it off in the train overnight.

"You said you knew Hussein ul Mulk," he commenced.

"Yes," replied the King's Messenger, "and what is more I have discovered his residence since we parted. It seems that one of the attachés at the Embassy met him recently and

(*Continued on page 31.*)

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False shame is a robber. It takes from us our pleasures, joys, and rightful inheritances, and gives us nothing in return. Is a woman ashamed of desiring beauty, or a man of acquiring strength? According to the publishers of Professor Boyd Laynard's great work, SECRETS OF BEAUTY, HEALTH, AND LONG LIFE, there are hundreds of thousands of such cases. In a recent interview with the publishers the following statement was made: "It is perfectly astounding the thousands of letters we are receiving from the public requesting us to send Professor Laynard's work privately packed! Of course we have always made a custom of doing so; but why people should be ashamed of receiving such a book is beyond our comprehension and very uncomplimentary to the Professor, who is the greatest living authority upon personal hygiene. But for all this, the sale of his work in the English language is rapidly approaching one million copies. Hindustani, Arabic, and Malayalam are among the latest translations."

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thought it advisable to keep in touch with the Young Turkish party, of which Hussein ul Mulk is the shining light. So he asked him where he lived, and as the result I have jotted down the address in my notebook." Gaultier searched through his memoranda, and speedily found what he wanted.

"Wait a minute," interrupted Brett. "Does it happen to be No. 11, Rue Barbette?"

The barrister had more than once surprised his companion during the night, but this time Gaultier seemed to be more annoyed than startled.

"If you know all these things so glibly," he said stiffly, "I don't see why you should bother me to get you the information. I certainly gathered from your remarks that the only acquaintance you had with Hussein ul Mulk was obtained from the newspapers, and that individual himself has the best of reasons for not publishing his address broadcast."

Brett smiled.

"You mean," he said, "that Hussein ul Mulk does live at No. 11, Rue Barbette."

"Why, of course he does," was the irritable answer.

"That is very odd," said the barrister. "It was a mere guess on my part, I assure you."

His assurance evidently did not weigh much with Captain Gaultier, who replaced his note-book in his pocket, and obviously cast about in his mind for a convenient excuse to take his departure.

Brett knew exactly what was troubling him.

"I am quite in earnest," he said, "in telling you that I simply hazarded a guess at the address. To prove that this is so I must place you in possession of certain incidents that transpired after we parted at the Gare du Nord."

Rapidly but succinctly he told the amazed King's Messenger of the chase in the cab across Paris, and how he, Brett, had followed the Frenchman who was tracking Gaultier's movements so closely.

"You will understand," he concluded, "that, in view of my preconceived theory, it was not a very far-fetched assumption to connect Hussein ul Mulk with the house in the Rue Barbette into which your spy vanished."

"Well," gasped his astonished hearer, "I must say, Mr. Brett, that I owe you an apology. I really thought at first you were fooling me, whereas now I learn that you simply kept your eyes open much wider than other people perhaps. Nevertheless, you have given me a genuine explanation of circumstances that were otherwise puzzling. For, do you know, I heard about that chap calling at the Embassy last night. The incident was unusual, to say the least, but I paid little attention to it, and certainly failed altogether to connect it with your visit to Paris. Even yet I do not see what reason anyone can have for shadowing my movements."

"I think it is mere chance," said Brett, "I imagine that our fellow-passenger in the train caught the name of Hussein ul Mulk in our conversation, and this decided him to shadow your movements, by means of the confederate who awaited his arrival at the station. As it happened, they simply hit upon the wrong person. It might have paid them much better to follow me. The outcome of the blunder is that I am in a fair way towards ascertaining all I want to know about them, whereas, up to the present, they do not even suspect my existence as an active agent in the affair."

"Well, now," said Gaultier, "since you have so satisfactorily cleared my mind of suspicion, in what way can I help you regarding Hussein ul Mulk?"

"Could you introduce me to him?"

"In what capacity?"

Brett reflected for a moment before replying.

"It would best suit my purpose if I met him as a political sympathiser."

Gaultier evidently did not like the idea. Foreign Office messengers do not care to be associated with politics in any shape or form.

"Is there no other way?" he asked dubiously.

"Plenty," said Brett. "I might pose as a friend of yours interested in Turkish carpets, or coffee, or cigarettes, but for the purpose of my inquiry it would be well to jump preliminaries at once and make this chance acquaintance under the guise of a wire-puller."

"All right," said Gaultier, "I can't see that it matters much to me, and the letter you have in your possession from the Under-Secretary is sufficient warrant for me to give you any assistance that lies in my power."

He glanced at his watch. "It is just about time for *dejeuner*," he continued. "What do you say if we drive to the Rue Barbette at once?"

The barrister assented, and they were soon crossing Paris with the superb disregard for other people's feelings that characterises the local cab-driver.

"By the way," inquired Gaultier, "have you learnt anything else since your arrival?"

"Only this—it was not our friend Talbot who came here on Tuesday with a lady."

"You are sure?"

"Positive. I have compared the handwriting in the hotel register with that of a letter undoubtedly written by Mr. Talbot, and the two do not agree. The appearance of the entry of 'Mr. and Mrs. Talbot, London,' in the visitors' book of the Grand Hotel, was a mere trick intended to amuse the police for a few hours until the conspirators had perfected their scheme for final and complete disappearance."

"It was a bold move," said the King's Messenger.

"Very. Quite in keeping with the rest of the details in the history of an uncommon crime."

At last the fiacre stopped in front of the house in Rue Barbette which Brett had already scrutinised during the early hours of the morning.

"Here we are," said Gaultier, with a laugh. "If we find Hussein ul Mulk at home I don't know what the dickens we are going to say to him. Remember that I depend upon you to carry out a difficult situation, because my Turkish friend will become suspicious the minute he finds me dabbling in intrigue. He knows quite well that such matters are quite outside of my usual business."

"I think I shall be able to interest him," said Brett, calmly; and without further preliminary Gaultier ascertained from the *concierge* that the Turkish gentleman was within.

The two men ascended to the second storey.

Gaultier rapped loudly upon the first door he encountered, and the summons appeared to scatter some of the inhabitants, judging by the rapid opening and closing of doors that preceded the appearance of an elderly and solemn-looking Turk, who cautiously unbolted the outer door and demanded their business.

Gaultier sent in his card, and the servitor locked the door in the faces of the two men while he went to ascertain his master's orders.

"They evidently do not mean to take many risks," he said, in a low voice.

"You are right," said Brett, "though they appear to take the greatest one of all without giving it a thought."

"And what is that?"

"This exhibition of nervousness and precaution before visitors are admitted. Why, the best way to excite suspicion is to behave just as they are doing."

But now the door was reopened, and the elderly Turk ushered them into a spacious room on the right of the entrance-hall, where they were received by a young man—a tall, dignified Mohammedan, who rose hastily from a chair, having apparently abandoned the perusal of a newspaper.

(To be continued.)

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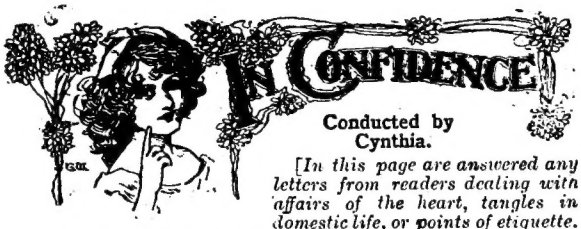

Conducted by Cynthia.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Non-Love Letters.

"F. R." met a girl a few months ago, and corresponded with her. She answered his letters in a very friendly strain. He now hears that she is engaged to another man. Should he continue writing to her?

* * * * *

I should certainly reply to her last letter definitely, giving a hint, if possible, that it is for her to decide whether or not she wishes to write to you any more or hear again from you. Of course if she replies and her letter invites another from you, you will write. But you should not take the initiative in continuing the correspondence as she is engaged to another man. There would, however, be no harm in a purely-friendly correspondence, such as many engaged girls exchange with male friends, with the knowledge and consent of their *fiancés*.

Loving a Married Man.

"Can a girl fall in love with a married man?" inquires "X." Unfortunately, "X.," there are no human limits to those whom one may love. Love knows no boundary lines. Consequently only too many married lives are wrecked through attachments entered into with others than husband or wife. But there is a point at which principle prevents such love attachments from ever assuming a dangerous stage. No right-minded man or woman would allow their feelings to develop towards a person who is another's property.

The Punishment of Coldness.

"F. B." is a girl of eighteen, and admits to me that she is very pretty. Until a year ago, she had been receiving attentions from a young man who had treated her very well indeed, and was much in love with her. She, however, only coldly returned his affections, and offended him. He left her, and she has not seen him since. Now she is anxious to resume the friendship, but she has heard that the man is going out with another girl. Should she apologise to him by writing, or not at all?

* * * *

The best thing would be to ask him to call on you, and then say how sorry you are that the quarrel took place, apologising if you think you were in the wrong. And then if he takes the apology as it is meant, beware against being too cold in future. There are many men who are very sensitive to coldness, and much discouraged by it. It often alienates their affections entirely. Do not exhibit it again.

Forming an Acquaintance.

"ANXIOUS ONE" has fallen in love with a young lady he sees at a church where he worships once a fortnight in company with his cousin. It is away from his own home. How should he try to form her acquaintance? He has her name and address.

Perhaps the clergyman knows her family, and also your cousin. If you move in the same social circle, it might be possible for you to meet in connection with some parochial affair, such as a bazaar, concert, or meeting. It may take some time to accomplish your desire, but as you belong to the same congregation, I should think there must sooner or later be some opportunity for your knowing each other, which would not exist if you attended different churches.

A Seaside Love.

"CAUTIOUS" has the usual doubts which follow on chance seaside acquaintanceships. He met a girl a year younger than himself—sixteen—and exchanged "sweet" letters and photos. Now he thinks he will get into trouble if he continues the affair, as he finds he "will not want the girl," to quote his own expression. He asks me if I think it wrong for him to continue writing love letters to her, seeing he is not really in love with the girl. They will meet at the same seaside town next year.

* * * *

I should say it would be very nice for "CAUTIOUS" to keep up a "sweet" tone in his correspondence. As he is only seventeen, I scarcely see that there can be any particular danger in doing so. One does not expect girls and boys at his age to exchange formal letters. When next year comes and they meet again, will be quite time for them to consider whether there is any lasting affection between them. If there is, well I am sure nothing could be nicer. But if "CAUTIOUS" really does not care for the girl, he should avoid any deception in the matter of correspondence. It is possible, he should remember, to write a sweet letter and yet not to commit himself to any false statement.

Sending Presents.

"LEONARD" is engaged to a girl, but she never sends him a present, though he constantly sends her things. Do I think he should continue to send them when nothing ever comes in return, even on his birthday?

* * * *

It is rather unusual for a girl engaged to a man to neglect his birthday. But perhaps the girl cannot afford to give you as good a present as she would wish, and thinks it better not to send a trifling object. Anyhow, one does not give presents merely in the expectation of receiving them. There is, I imagine, a pleasure in giving to those you love which is independent of any self-interest. If you are still fond of the girl, I suppose you will continue to give her presents. It would be nicer if she occasionally returned them, but after all, I suppose she would do so if it lay in her power.

Sowing Suspicion.

"M. M." has fallen in love with a young man, but her friends warn her from making his acquaintance. They will not, however, give the reason. The young man has announced that he is much attracted by "M. M." Should she try to know him under the circumstances?

* * * *

Probably your friends have some reason for warning you against the young man. It is unkind of them not to tell you the reason they wish you not to know him, so that you could make up your own mind on the point. If they continue to refuse to tell you, the best thing is to refuse to believe anything. If you are brought together, you should easily be able to judge for yourself whether he is or is not a desirable friend for you. The warning may have been based solely on Rumour, and she is, as we all know, a lying jade. The man may be really quite a good fellow, and yet the victim of some petty scandal.

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"IT'S CHRONIC!"

What a curious saying, or rather exclamation, has now caught the popular fancy—"It's chronic!" And what a flavour of keen sarcastic humour there is about it, too. Mention the torn-up condition of the roads in every direction "It's chronic!" Speak of the flatness of trade—of the iniquity of combines—of the lock-outs and strikes—of slumps and falling markets—of the matinée hat. "It's chronic!" When a thing has become chronic, it represents a fixed evil.

FOR INSTANCE, an occasional bilious attack, or indigestion, or a run-down state of the nervous system, may not be very remarkable; but as these ailments, by slow degrees, take on a more or less permanent character, why then, "It's chronic!" And none but sufferers from such diseases can realise the dire meaning of those words. If it were only not chronic—if the particular cause of trouble was transitory—so that its victims could hope for peace; but no, they sorrowfully think, "It's chronic!" Nevertheless, in the great majority of cases the evil need not be chronic. It can be quite cured; and in many other cases it never need become chronic at all. It can be nipped in the bud. An old and faithful remedy is always at hand. Already you have a feeling that you ought to have remembered

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Just so. That approved vegetable medicine is, without doubt, a specific for most of those diseases which have their origin in a disordered state of the stomach, liver, or kidneys. They regulate the digestive secretions, stimulate the action of the liver, and are one of the most powerful aids in eliminating uric acid from the system. As a general and family medicine they are beyond praise, and when **BEECHAM'S PILLS** are judiciously taken or administered, according to the directions which accompany each box, few of the troublesome ailments which make life a misery to thousands need become, or continue to be, **CHRONIC.**

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